

KAZUKI SORANO

空埜一樹

死なない男に
恋した少女



Chapter 01: Immortal Boy and the killing Devil

"Node Kugito!"

To be honest, I was in a pinch.

I was surrounded by a couple of guys who knew it. "It" being "that", which is just your plain old pinch.

It looks like they wanted to lecture my recent arrogance by executing group violence, so after school they forcefully brought me to an abandoned factory without anyone else around. And at present, these guys, everyone holding on either a wooden sword, a nail-bat, a golf club or a steel pipe, were threatening me while standing in a circle around me. The eyes blood-shot, the teeth baring, their expression towards me were like a beast unable to suppress it's hunger.

They were totally after my head.

"Aw, guys, calm down."

I first advised this to the angered bunch. The one and only ability to draw the line between a human and a beast is language, isn't it?

"Shut it!"

I was shut down immediately. Darwin was completely ignored.

"C'mon, don't say that. Listen to me for a bit. For now let's start with the most basic thing.... Just what did I do?"

"Shut up! Take a close look at the situation you're in!"

Delinquent A, whose name I don't know, spew that at me while waving his hands. Like he told me to, I took a look around me. Aha, on the dusty concrete floor laid a bunch of delinquents, who came at me, dithering, and I really mean dithering. The scene resembled a fish market. That would make these guys worth

-5000 yen per kilo.

"You did all this, so don't play dumb now!"

Delinquent A raged. In other words, he wanted to say this: You beat up all our guys, so what are you trying to play innocent for now, you crying chicken. Is the term crying chicken a bit too old? Anyways, his speech was a bit misleading. To begin with, these guys started the fight. With the result as it is, the "What did I do" applies to them and the "You did all this" part can be seen as them shifting all the blame on me. Also, technically speaking, he didn't answer my question.

And lastly the most important fact, "I didn't do anything".

"Hey, hey, you're the ones playing dumb. It's them who started coming at me for no reason."

And then they collapsed for no reason.

Yes.

"—They got tired of hitting me."

They all became tired, didn't they?

I haven't done anything that could be called retaliation.

"Hey, I'm not at fault here. You guys are just too weak."

"You bastard are just too rough, damnit! You monster!"

When delinquent A shouted this, delinquent B besides him whispered to him.

"Hey, careful, Head. This guy... you know, from the rumour."

"Don't call me Head! Also, how stupid can you get? That story is obviously all made-up!"

Upon delinquent A, no, Head's statement I made a questioning look. I don't know what the rumour is about, but it can't be anything decent.

"Hey, Head"

"I just said not to call me Head!"

"That rumour you're speaking of, could it be that one? The one about me—"

I said while inclining my head.

"—me being <immortal>".

All the delinquents went pale. Hearing it from the person in question himself, their "hunch" surely got promoted to a "feasibility". It might even become a "Oh shit!" when they think about it more.

If they would just run away scared now that would be most favourable, but that doesn't seem to be the case. Quite the contrary, Head stepped forwards with an odd smile, as if their useless pride on the level of dog food was hurt.

"...Heh. Hehe. Can't be. That's not possible. O- Okay. I'll proof it."

Saying that, Head pulled out a knife that was clearly against the law. He's a dangerous guy.

"S- Stop it, Head!"

"Right, what if it really is just a joke. You would become killer, Head!"

"Stop, Head!"

"Are you serious, Head?"

"Think it over, Head!"

"Shut it. Don't call me Head! And you, don't join in in the confusion!"

I was busted.

"...Geez".

I sighed and scratched my head. Being watched by the other delinquents in anxiety, Head gulped and spoke.

"Okay—"

and immediately followed by,

"Die, Node Kugito!"

Shouting my most hateful name, he started running. Head crossed the distance between us in an instant. He's surprisingly fast. He might actually be in the Track and Field club or so. I didn't move. With his eyes blood-shot possible out of tension, Head raised his knife and thrust it. And penetrating my chest—

he stabbed me.

The tip of the straight-plunged knife penetrated without doubt deeply into my chest. Head let go off the knife and backed off while saying "I... I did it. I really did it...!" with a shaking voice.

I felt my own body slowly falling. Soon after my back hit the hard floor and after I bounced up a bit, I laid flat down.

"Heh, Hehe. S- So easy. Serves you right!"

Maybe feeling satisfied by his act, Head rose up both his arms.

"I... I never liked you to begin with. How you took every high school around here under your control and still lived on as it were nothing. Neither did I like your cocky attitude of never raising a hand yourself in a fight. B- But you weren't anything special. Haha, Hahahaha, Hahahahaha!"

.....

.....

.....Now then.

“This should do”

“Wha!”



Raising my body, I stood up while putting my hand on my bent knee. It hurt quite a bit, but it wasn't unbearable.

"You done?"

Head and the other delinquent look at me like I'm a zombie when I asked. Well, to them, I'm probably one.

All bored I said,

"I told you."

I grab the hilt of the knife that's still plunged into my chest. I quickly pull it out and blood gushes out from the wound. But the wound soon started to heal.

"I"

The knife I tossed back made an arc in midair and hit the ground with a light cling. Stepping on it I started talking.

"won't die, no matter what."

Falling to death, 32 times. Poisoned, 15 times. Gaping artery, 45 times. Hanged, 25 times. Gas inhalation, 13 times.

All those who heard these numbers reacted the same way: stunned. "What are these numbers?" I solved the mystery immediately.

These numbers are a record of my deaths.

In my short life of 17 years, including even the smallest attempts, I committed suicide easily over a hundred times.

At the same time you can also call them the numbers of tries to test my peculiar power.

Yeah, without any reserve I can say that I'm <immortal>.

But seeing as I aged normally so far, it doesn't look like I have <eternal youth>. Probably when I hit my 80s or so, I'll die a natural death like anyone else.

But otherwise I won't die. Be it getting stabbed, getting strangled, inhaling gas, jumping from a high building or swallowing poison, my life flame won't extinguish.

The reason? Who knows. I'm the one who wants to know that the most.

I became aware of my power as a kid. And ironically by the person I hate the most in the world.

It took quite some time for me to accept that I'm immortal. That's why the huge

numbers. So far I hadn't tried out a car accident, but it's unlikely I will try that. The reason is simple, I don't want to cause trouble for others. Also, I heard that you have to pay a large sum of compensation if you hinder the train traffic. Well that aside.

It's not like I have a dying wish.

But the fact that I'm immortal makes me believe that I can't prove my existence right here and now.

Maybe I'm already dead and some kind of phenomena is making me believe that I'm still living. I can't deny that possibility outright.

The reason I never raise a hand myself in a fight is because of that. Not only is the essential part unclear, but also doesn't feel kicking, hitting and whatever else I do real to me. I'm not even getting motivated. That's why I cannot help but worry if I'm really living by my own will.

"...Aw, damn"

Deeply in thought about various things, I stopped in front of my house. That's because the light in the living room was on.

"Why is she only coming back at a time like this..."

I checked my appearance by looking down on myself. All traces of the delinquents having their way with me vanished. Healing faster than the average person is also a power of mine. Or maybe it's just a side-track of my immorality. I'll leave that question for later.

From all the ruthless pulling and yanking my uniform is a complete mess. Only that won't recover.

I hope I won't be seen.

Trying to make as little noise as possible, I opened the front door, slowly took off my shoes and sneaked towards the stairs leading to the 2nd floor.

From the living room I could hear some laughing that probably is coming from the TV. ..Okay, I hadn't been noticed so far.

Right when I thought that, I bumped onto the teddy bear sitting on the shoe shelf, since it was in my blind spot, causing it to fall on the floor. That alone wasn't anything problematic, but the teddy bear (Mr. Bearzawa) was a popular talking bear doll that had an implanted tape that reacts onto impact.

"Good morning, I'm Mr. Bear! Will I get any honey today!?"

Go catch some fishes, you damn carnivore!

"....Kugito?"

Fuck! I kicked the teddy bear (Mr. Bearzawa) away. Upon hitting the wall, Mr Bearzawa announced, "My friend is the mini pig, Mr. Beacon!"

"Kugito? Is that you?"

I could hear a chair clattering and then the curtain on the door to the living room was drawn aside. Looking at me she said,

"At least say something when you get home. You're so cold."

"...I'm home, Sis"

I greeted my older sister Yukika, whose childish traces made her look not even 20 years old, while she was actually 25. She had her long black hair tied up in the back and was wearing a rough outfit with a tank-top and jeans as always.

"What happened to your job?"

"Once in a while I get home early. You have a problem with that?"

"Not really..."

While my sister asked me that I slowly moved towards the stair like a crab.

Please don't let her notice. Please don't let her notice. Please don't let—

"Ah!"

"Gya!"

First my sister was watching my strange behaviour doubtfully, but suddenly she let out a shrill, pointed her finger and was slowly raising her eyebrows with wide open eyes, which gave her an expression like Prajna.

"You—!"

"S- Sorry!"

Without hesitation she came over and grabbed my shoulder.

"You were fighting again!"

"I.. I was not."

"But you were apologizing just now!"

"That's more like a defensive reflex towards an attacking demon."

"Then what's with your clothes. They're a total mess!"

My sister strongly grabbed my head, which I was averting, with both her hands and was forcing it to face hers. It's over. For the next two hours I'll be hearing her lecture. And afterwards I'll probably have to pay for the uniform from my allowance. Good-bye my things that I wanted to buy. Adios my luxury lunch. And farewell my dreams and hopes.

"You know I already told you to keep it low since you look like a criminal to begin with!"

"I'm living quite modest. It's them, who come at me. Also, that criminal part was uncalled for!"

"You know, you should just ignore them then! If you just don't meet their eyes and think of yourself as air, it'll all work out peacefully!"

"No, that's pathetic!"

"Still better than being hit! Besides, think about my standpoint too! I'm losing face when my criminal little brother is always picking fights!"

My sister works at the police station here in Meitou, the town we live in. Her duty is to keep the general security, so if her little brother is having fun in fights every day, she surely will lose face.

But she isn't scolding me for her own good. She knows that rather than giving me a half-assed warning, telling me that I'm causing trouble is a better method to make me reflect on my actions. It frustrates me falling for her trick, but it's actually working. With my head lowered I answered.

"....I'm sorry."

Maybe she noticed that I was sincere, since her expression eased up and sighed a "....Honestly".

"I know you're like <that>, but that doesn't mean you just go ahead and injure yourself. Don't make me worry so much."

"I know. Sorry."

The second person to know about my power is my sister. It's also the reason why we're living apart from our parents. Because of that I always fear to cause her trouble. Seeing that I really reflected on my actions, she stops crossing her arms and gives me a smile.

"As long as you understand. Now let's eat together."

"That's a surprise. What kind of lunch-box will it be?"

"It makes me really angry that you think that my cooking equals a lunch-box from the convenience store."

That's because I'm handling all the house chores normally, since you're always home late from work, isn't it.

"Even I can cook, you know. Don't underestimate me."

"What did you cook?"

"I made omelette, grilled yellowtail and nameko miso-soup!"

"Really?"

"—was at least the plan"

My sister continued in a low voice. "...So, in the end, it'll be a deluxe pork chop lunch-box."

"I really love convenience lunch-boxes."

"I'm glad. Though I would have been happier if you had said that a bit more honestly."

That's an impossible request.

"Then try to think how I feel when I was expecting a miracle."

"Great expectation will just change into just as big despair when unmet. Now let's eat."

"Okay"

"And after eating the scolding continues."

"...Okay"

I replied crestfallen.

"—The usual exposure of carps at the park gathered a large crowd of parents with their kids, who set the carps free into the river."

The TV was running some boring local news. My sister was drinking her after-lunch tea while watching it.

As for me, I died..... She really scolded me for two full hours.

"The police captain of the station in OX Town sexually harassed a female subordinator by the likes of touching her chest for two years and was made public by the report of—"

"The world sure is rotten."

My heart is rotten away too.

"Your grade of decay is just fine."

What am I, cheese?

"...Now onto the next news."

Suddenly the voice of the announcer, who read the news monotone so far, changed. Not only his voice but his body tensed up too.

"This morning at dawn, in Meitou, XX Prefecture, a patrolling police officer found the corpse of a man stabbed to death."

The hand of my sister holding the tea cup stopped. I also looked at the screen. It's sad, but a murderer isn't all that rare these days. But it's different when it happened in our town.

The footage changed and showed a crossroad. Judging by the nearby buildings, it wasn't all that far away from here.

"How eerie"

"The man was cut at various places and the big cross wound on his chest makes the police believe that this case is related to the serial killer case currently occurring all over Japan. The police is continuing their investigation."

"A cross.... That killing Devil, huh."

My sister murmured and I just nodded silently.

The killing Devil that inflicts cross wounds--

It was the name given to the serial killer that started killing people in a provincial town a few years ago and repeated his pattern over and over again after that.

The strange thing about this case is that he never stayed at one place and always moved to a new destination after a set period of time. So far he went all the way from Kyushu up to Akita. He continued his murders over this broad area. That's the reason why the police didn't handle it as a serial killer at first, but the murderer would always leave a cross shaped wound on his victims, which lead the authorities to believe it's the same person.

But because such a incident never happened before, even a part of the police were full of doubts. Not knowing if all the murders so far were done by a single person, by a group or were just copycats, the investigation made no real progress.

"But it just seems too fishy to be done by a single person. One wouldn't be able to pull that off while still keeping up a normal lifestyle."

"That's what's troubling us. Wait, this isn't my case. Most likely Investigation Headquarters will handle it. I can't really come to like these prefecture police

guys.”

My sister sighs to prevent a wrinkle from forming on her forehead.

“You don’t know how the murderer looks?”

“Well, of course they applied some profiling. Since the murders are always deep in the night, the culprit should be working at daytime.”

“Ah, the “Midnight killing Devil”, huh”

While <Devil that slashes in a cross> is more of a general name, he’s also partly famous as the <Midnight killing Devil>. And by partly I mean the folks on the internet, in the online world. The case had already become a big topic in real life and even on the internet, where information spreads easily and without restraint, it became a huge topic. It’s not known who gave him that nickname, but he got it because he always strikes deep in night.

“Yeah. And because he seems to like showing off his existence, he’s thought to be young—HEY.”

“What?”

“You’re making me spill classified information. What now!”

“Why is it my fault...”

The report about the murder case wasn’t all that long and finished soon. Guess it’s means they just didn’t have much information yet to make public. My sister works in the department for general security, which includes juvenile delinquency, so this case doesn’t really involve her, but it seems like she’ll still come home late at night. That’s when my brain switched into my hated household mode and I thought how I should prepare a menu for my sister that relieves her stress.

“...Onto the next news. The reports from neighbours in town OX brought up that Suzuhara Akane-chan, 4 years-old, passed away due to excessive violence by her mother.”

The relaxed atmosphere between my sister and I after dinner froze instantly....Damn, not good.

“Akane-chan was violently abused by her mother and not giving enough food for months. Not only showed the corpse signs of hits, but also burns. The police arrested Akane-chan’s mother, Suzuhara Ayane, and are continuing investigation with her as the suspect.”

My sister was calmly drinking her tea. But on a closer look I could tell. Her hand was shaking slightly, her eyes showed a fierce anger and she was glaring at the TV as if that mother were sitting right there.

I took the remote control and turned off the TV. With a tone that pierced the atmosphere, the screen turned black. It followed a deep silence.

"...I'm going to the convenience store for a bit."

Saying that I stood up from my chair.

My sister kept staring at the blank TV without saying anything.

I was thinking about saying "I'll be back quick", but decided against it.

The moon was out. It was a waxing moon that looked like it cute the night sky in half. With a plastic bag in my hand, which had some random juice and snacks in it that I bought at the convenience store, I walked slowly as drag out my returning as much as possible while looking up at the dark sky.

I sighed. Technically it was already spring, but the winter was persistently dragging on. My white breath faded into the darkness. Remembering the news from earlier, I shake my head in displease. Some unpleasant memory resurfaced. For most people, memories from before their start of reasoning slowly start to fade over time and eventually disappear, but that's not the case for me. How nice would it be if I could forget.

....As a kid, I was violently abused by my father.

It was my fault. Or at least my father thought that.

My mother died shortly after giving birth to me. My father deeply loved my mother, his wife, and totally went nuts after losing her. He quit his job, drowned himself in alcohol and didn't leave the house anymore. At some point, he then starting using violence against me. That was the point where I came aware of my unusual power. My father started getting more violent with me. Punches and kicks were a given. Burning my skin with a cigarette or a lighter was a common occurrence. Sometimes I was also beaten with the wooden sword (ironically I asked my sister to buy for me), which we had at home. The strength of his hits made me bled and the anger in his hits broke my bones. At that time, my sister herself was still young and couldn't protect me. But I can still remember how she still stood bravely between me and my father in an attempt to protect me.

I survived despite the horrible abuse of my father. Though of course I felt the pain and got wounds every time. But they would heal soon and not leave any mark behind. That's what pissed my father off. But at the same time, a fear towards me was born inside him. At some point my father blamed the death of my mother onto the fact that she bore a monster like me. That might have been his way to escape reality. Still, for my father it was a legitimate reason to hurt me.

His abuse against me got worse by the day. He thrown me off the roof. He stabbed me with a big kitchen knife. He threw me into open fires. He drowned me in the bath. He forced me to eat cigarettes. He even strangled me at night when I

slept.

But I still didn't die. That made my father lose all reason. Since then, my father continued his abuses for more than 10 years. I'm surprised at myself for not going crazy over that. No, I actually might have gone crazy already. I'm just not aware of it, but to begin with, I believe that one couldn't be called crazy anymore once he's aware of it, or so. Well, let's leave that aside for now.

As soon as my sister graduated from police school and got assigned to the Meitou station, she left the house with me. Running out of my mother's savings and my father's pension, my sister raised me while even working part-time. Because of that my father would have trouble in the future, but my sister and me didn't have the time to worry about that, nor were we that forgiving.

Ultimately, I'm living a peaceful life now. It's regrettable that I'm sometimes dragged into fights like today, but compared to my father, these delinquents are nothing.

However, the topic of abuse is an ultimate taboo at our house. Whenever the topic comes up nevertheless by some kind of happening, like a report on TV, my sister freezes up. I think that my sister suffered a kind of trauma after only being able to watch me getting abused by our father for over 10 years. As for me, I'm eternally thankful to my sister, who got me out of that hell.

Anyway—What I wanted to say is that it was a real hardship to leave our parent's house. I want to live a peaceful life, so I can gladly do without that that highly menacing atmosphere.

"Guess I'll drop by the park...."

I just got that idea. Once my sister gets like that, she'll be in a bad mood for an hour. There was still a bit of time left.

I changed my direction and headed for the public children park. Around 20 minutes passed. I like lazing around, so it's not that hard for me to spend time doing nothing.

After walking for a while, the Meitou Park, which was obviously build by tax planning with just a slide, a swing and a jungle gym, came into sight.

...That's when I stopped. I could hear some kind of sound. A strange sound of something hard cutting into something soft. And repetitive at that. Over and over again. Was there someone...? I was wary, but my curiosity won slightly over it. I started to walk on. The blinking street light gave the park an eerie aura.

Nearing the entrance of the park, I saw someone sitting there. In the centre of the small park a small silhouette could be seen. It appears the sound was made by that person. A slushy or rather mushy sound. It was hard to describe. But one thing was certain after hearing it, it wasn't a pleasant sound.

The person seemed to be a girl. Her age... probably around mine. She had semi-long black-hair that merged with the darkness. I thought she was wearing a thick coat, but I realized it was covered in a rain-coat. A raincoat... Even though there wasn't a single cloud?

She was swinging her hand and with all her might, she—- she was—
stabbing something?

I caught my breath.

The girl wasn't alone.

Unless real close, I couldn't see it, since it was covered by shadows.

The girl wasn't sitting.

—She was on top of someone that lay on the ground and was stabbing something.

My instinct told me it's dangerous.

I don't really understand why, but sometimes I can feel something like a smell. Like from the delinquents lurking in front of the station. Or from guys who are overly wary over their surroundings. A peculiar <smell> that tells me that something is about to happen I better not get involved with. And the girl was reeking of it. Better not get any closer. Something in my head was telling me that. Trying to get away, I stepped one step backwards.

CRASH. I froze up and looked at my left hand. Fucking shit! Maybe the store clerk packed it wrongly, but the plastic bag ripped and all the contents fell out. The canned coffee I bought early rolled away. What was that asshole thinking, putting my ice coffee and meat-bun into the same bag! I was now in a crisis because of that!

"...."

I stood there frozen like I was glued to the ground.

Because the girl stopped her hand and slowly stood up.

She swung her arm. In the dim light I saw red blood dispersing. Okay, I'll say it once more. I repeated to myself.

Red blood dispersed.

The girl suddenly turned around.

This was what you would call paralyzed by fear.

The face of the girl, perfectly divided into half by the light and shadow, was covered in blood. No, it wasn't just her face. That's where I finally understood why she was wearing a rain-coat. Bathed in her victim's blood. Her arms, her torso, her legs, everything was dyed red. And in her hand she was holding a big knife dripping with blood.

Laying flat on the ground below the girl was a man.

No— To be more precise, it was once a man, now it was just a mass of flesh.

He was cut up so cruelly that you could even tell from afar. His whole body was cut everywhere. And without doubt I could see it.

The cross-shaped wound carved into his chest.

"—The midnight....killing Devil"

My memories was stimulated and even though it wasn't the time for it, I checked the clock on my cell. It was half past ten. Totally different from what the stories say!

I was careless, was my only excuse. The murder happened here in Meitou. It's not all that strange that the culprit would still be here. Yet, I treated the incident like it happened somewhere far away.

Damnit— I gotta run. Every fibre of my body told me so. Run. Run. Run. Run. RunRunRunRunRunRunRunRunRunRunRun! The same word was repeated inside my head like a siren. Even if I can't die, I still feel the pain. Getting my body messed up like that surely isn't something I could bear. Hurry. HurryHurryHurryHurryHurryHurry,

Hurry!

"!"

I turned around and took one step forward, ready to spring at full-speed.

STAB.

"Wha—"

I froze up. No way?

I just turned my head back. Then I saw it.

The killing devil standing right behind me with her knife plunged deeply into my waist. Inhuman. There was so much distance between us before!

The killing Devil pulled out the knife. Along with a warm sensation, my blood gushed out. My knees got weak, but I managed to remain upright. But that was a

pointless effort.

The killing Devil grabbed my shoulder. I tried to resist, but with a power unfit for a girl, she turned around my body. I looked straight into her blood covered face. It was a miracle that I didn't scream. At the same time, she hit me on the same spot I was stabbed just now. I let out a groan and staggered. This bitch kicked me!

I lost my balanced and fell down backwards. The killing Devil jumped and at the same time I hit the ground she landed on me. Holding my arms down with one hand, she restrained my movements. And both her legs were locking my body. I was now in a position to look up to her. It was the perfect cowgirl position. I'm not happy at all!

Then the killing Devil started swing her hand with the knife.

—-Stab.

StabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabStabS

My body was riddled by the sharp and thick blade. Stab after stab after stab after stab after stab. The killing Devil repeatedly stabbed me with no end in sight. Every time blood would come out, tainting the moon in the night sky.

The killing Devil was smiling happily and queer. Just like a kid who had gotten a new toy.

Her appearance had much resemblance to my father's. He also had the same face when he stabbed me. Merely people, who can find their meaning in life in violence alone, can show such a twisted smile. I was about to pass out from the pain, but I was more resilient against it than the normal human. I would assume that a shock won't kill me, but— I never hated my power as much as I did right now. Think about it. You have to watch yourself getting stabbed all the while you're unable to lose consciousness. It's worse than any torture.

After enjoying the stabbing show for a while, the killing Devil stops her hand. I thought she would release me, but I was wrong. While she stood up, she pulled me also up on my collar. The light shone on her face. Looking from close up, she got a good build. Her pointed chin suits her sharp eyes. What the fuck was I thinking.

"Don't think bad of me"

The killing Devil spoke for the first time.

"It was an inevitability"

She rotated her knife and grabbed onto the grip.

Then she swiftly cut me horizontal and vertical with a grand technique. A lot of blood was sticking to her forehead.

I'm pretty sure she engraved a cross on me just now. Now I'm one of the victims of the famous <Midnight killing Devil>. What an honour. Fucking shit. Inevitability my ass!

She's enjoying it to the fullest!

"Now then— Farewell"

Speaking in a high soprano singing voice, she let go off me.

Just then—

"Rest in peace"

The knife in her hand deeply pierced into my heart.

Chapter 02: Preparations and Transfer

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For a normal human this would have been the end. The end titles of my life with the ultimate bad ending. If I were a spectator, I would throw popcorn at the director, who came up to the stage to make a greeting.

But unfortunately I'm not a normal human. I played dead, waited for the killing Devil to leave and then went home. I was lucky that my sister was already asleep. Who knows what she would have said when seeing me like this. I changed my clothes and secretly disposed of my perforated clothes. I don't really care for fashion, so I have a couple of sets of the same clothes. I'm sure my sister won't notice it.

Then I slept soundly and welcomed the morning as nothing had happened. As a proper working student, I'm attending the Public Meitou Academy, which I solely chose on the fact that's it a fifteen minutes walk from my house. The morning sun was enlightening the world with it's glowing light and I was walking to school with a lot of other students. If I may say so myself, I'm quite tough. After all I'm going to school normally after I got killed just yesterday (I was killed for certain).

While oppressing a yawn, I dwelled on my surprise. To think the killing Devil was girl close to my age. Guess as a law-abiding citizen and brother of a policewoman, I obviously ought to report her. Reminds me, yesterday I abandon the guy she killed by prioritizing my own escape, but I wondered what happened to him. I felt a bit guilty. Well, even if I don't do anything, someone will report the found of the corpse to the police at some point. I brushed it away irresponsible. That damn organization didn't really do anything in the case of my father even though my sister urged them to. That's why I didn't really like the police and didn't want to have to do with them. It seems my sister made some enemies when she tried to bring change from within, so that no one would have to suffer like me. I respect her for such a honest approach.

But knowing the culprit, I ought to tell at least my sister about it. While leaving out the part about me getting killed. It would just bring trouble. I shook my head in annoyance.

"A donation please!"

I could suddenly hear a colourful voice attacking my ear-drums, when I was already in a bad mood early in the morning. A few students were standing in front of the school gate with a box made of paper and calling out to the passing through people. Those who put money into the box got a blue wing pinned to their chest. It was a blue wing donation. [Blue Wing: Raising funds for the coast guard] They're so diligent so early in the morning.

Normally the student council is responsible for such activities, but at our school it's a complete volunteer work, done by interested people. But coming to school early on a already sleepy morning and having to call out to others, only to be awarded with the invisible medal called good deed, sounds all tempting, so obviously I also participate.... As if. But interesting enough, year after year, a whim brings people to step up for the task, so I guess humanity isn't beyond help yet. Thinking that I at least have to help out a bit too, I took out my wallet from my pocket and hesitantly picked a 50 yen coin from my already small allowance (which was reduced even further due to the happenings last night), when I suddenly heard a cheerful voice.

"Ah, it's Kugi-chan!"

I put the 50 yen coin back into my wallet and quickly started to leave. I was careless. I totally forgot about the person, who would 100% be present at such an event.

"Hey wait, Kugi-chan. Aren't you going to donate?"

Trying to escape the criticism-glances of the other students, I wanted to enter through the school gate, but my path was blocked by a girl. With her height shorter than mine by 1-2 head length and carrying a box with her small stature, she looked more like a grade schooler that got a present from Santa instead of someone asking for donations.

The name of the girl, whose hair design that combined three braids at her back was her trademark, was Kuon Rin. She was your average high school girl with normal grades and clumsy at sports, which you can find at every school, but she had two strange parts about her.

First, she was extremely passionate about volunteer work. She passionately participates in all kinds of volunteering, which people usually find annoying, from city cleaning to talking with the old folks at the nursing home, not just collecting donations. What's more, she's not doing with a hidden goal of gaining credits or the favour of the teachers, no, she simply does it out of goodwill and that's what makes her strange. In short, she's a credulous girl from birth on.

And the second part is that she's become attached to me for some reason.

There are a lot of delinquents like the ones from yesterday, who are after me. That's because somehow all high schools in the prefecture fell under my control, since I won all the fights due to my power. Everyone here at school thus fears me. I believe that to be only natural, but Kuon Rin was treating me strangely friendly after we became classmates in our second year. At first I was annoyed by it (and I still am), but to a certain degree I had resigned myself to my fate and at least replied to her.

"A donation is giving by the person's goodwill, isn't it. It's not something to be claimed."

"Yeah, but it's not going well, so I'm troubled. Just one or ten yen are fine, just donate."

"My ten yen will hardly make any difference at this point."

"Because everyone thinks like that the box won't fill!"

Makes sense. I sighed, pulled out my wallet and took out the 50 yen coin from earlier. Then I stopped for a moment, groaned and put the coin back.

"Aw, what's with you. Don't pull back now"

"I'm not that cockish."

I fished out a 100 yen coin and dropped it into Kuon Rin's present box, I mean, donation box.

"There"

"OH! Hehe, thanks. Like I thought, you're a good guy, Kugu-chan!"

Seeing her bright smile, I gave a bit of a bitter smile. I hate being called by my own name. That's because every time someone calls it, I always get reminded how the name came into being by my father's malice without having a say in it myself. I mean, just listen to it: Kugito. That's not a name a loving parent would give you. Only my sister and Rin are an exception. It goes without saying that whatever my sister calls me I don't feel uncomfortable. I believe that to be a very important talent.

"Reminds me, did you hear about it, Kugi-chan?"

There was still plenty of time until classes start. So I stopped and took her up on her question.

"Heard what?"

Rin drew closer to me. Then she stretched her back and put a finger on her mouth, so I bended down and lent her my ear. Like when sharing a secret, Rin whispered,

"....They say close by a murder happened."

I automatically let out a strange "Bfft" sound from my mouth.

"Gya! Stupid Kugi-chan! You spat on me! So filthy!"

"A- Aw, sorry. Well, rest assured, it doesn't look all that different."

"So mean!?"

I pulled out a tissue, handed it to Rin and she wiped her face with puffed cheeks.

"Sure, it's surprising, but not so much for such an exaggerated reaction..."

"....Hahaha"

I can't really tell her that I witnessed that murder. Rin continued.

"I heard that it was a man, who was killed.... Seems to be that. Ehm, what was it again? The killing records of Juumonji Tarou?"

"What kind of funny tale is that?"

"No wait, was it Juumonji's killing method?"

Just stop with the Juumonji.

"Ah, it's Juumon Montarou's travel records!"

She only kept the Juumon.

"....You mean the cross-slashing Devil."

"Yeah, that! That whatever-Devil was at work, they say. How eerie."

"Right. You too be careful not to get attacked."

"Yeah, same to you, Kugi-chan. Be careful not to run into him by chance on your way back from the convenience store late at night."

"Ugh. I can't laugh at that joke."

"Joke?"

"No, nothing. I got it. Okay, I'm off then."

"Yeah. See you later. Oh, right!"

"There's more?"

She nodded, her serious expression (for her at least) from earlier changed into a bright smile and she said,

"Today our class is supposed to get a transfer student. The teacher said so. I'm so excited!"

"Transfer student? What a lame time to transfer in. I mean, the year is almost over."

"It seems to be due to family circumstances. Kugi-chan, be nice to the transfer student."

"You do that. I'll pass."

I gave Rin a light chop on the head, shrugged and headed to the classroom.

A transfer student is always welcomed with great expectations. Will it be a beautiful girl? An honour student? Will she have big breasts? Or great legs? Will it be a handsome guy? Or an model? Such rumours were already going around in the classroom before homeroom.

I can't really say that I didn't care at all, but I wasn't wishing or hoping for anything like the other guys. I was just thinking that the transfer student will be just your every-day student. Exaggerated hopes will just give you a big shock when unmet. Wait, wasn't I told the same by someone yesterday?

"Who will it be~ Who will it be~"

Besides me, Rin's unstoppable excitement was transferred over to her desk, making it shake. What a simpleton. Well, finding fun things in your everyday life might be the secret to spend a fulfilling life until the end.

"Let's see. Average communication skills, average socializing, average grades, average athletic and after a few weeks he/she will have blended into the class like any other. That's the kind of transfer student we will get."

"You're no fun."

"Call it being realistic"

Actually, the world doesn't work so conveniently. The transfer student being either a genius, a big-breasted girl, an ability-user, an alien, a time traveller, a magician, a soldier, or a beautiful girl warrior is something only happening in a manga.

A shocking encounter once or twice in your life is more than enough. And there are also plenty of women and men, who don't even have that and just get past the age for marriage in simple admiration for a fated partner after seeing a horoscope in a magazine or a love movie.

The door opened. The ruckus in the classroom died down.

First our homeroom teacher, who barely left any impression on us since the beginning of the 2nd year, stood at the front.

"Ehem, most of you might already know about it, but our class got a transfer student"

Everyone was closely listening to this set phrase. Our homeroom teacher fixed his glasses, maybe in an attempt to create a short silence. Then he faced the door and said,

"Come in."

I put my elbow on my desk and was the only uninterested one within all my fired up classmates. Reminds me, I wonder of that killing Devil attends a school normally. She unexpectedly might be some honour student. On TV news you often hear people commenting about the culprit with "He didn't look like a person to do such a thing at all", but if that's true, then the "Madman who realizes his own lunacy" which I spoke of yesterday, might actually exist. Such a person would always consider how to kill the neighbour, who greets friendly with a 'Good morning', or a friend, who suggests to go home together. All while wearing a smile that doesn't give any doubt. That's quite scary.

"Kugi-chan, look."

Rin's voice dragged back my consciousness. While I was deep in thought, the transfer student had entered the classroom. Since I was staring into the void, I focused my gaze toward the front.

"I'm Kirisaki Kyouko."

...And right that instant, I froze up.

"Due to my father's job we moved here. Please treat me kindly."

Technically, I'm a realist. I don't believe in fate and such. But only now it was different.

Cursing the great flow of the world, I hoped it to be a dream or illusion.

"Kugi-chan, she's cute! So nice. She seems so elegant. Maybe she's rich..... Kugi-chan? What's wrong?"

Rin was saying something, but I couldn't hear it well. That's how disturbed I was.

<She> was just surveying the class.

And then she made eye-contact with me.

"...."

<She> also froze up.

"...."

"...."

<She> and me stared at each other for roughly ten seconds.

"...What's up, Kirisaki? Something the matter?"

Upon the teacher's question, <she> averted her gaze.

"....No, it's nothing."

When she said that with a calm voice, the teacher nodded and pointed her to a seat in the corner of the classroom.

"Okay, this will be your seat."

<She> nodded and started walking. Everyone was in awe by her elegant moves. Her movements were the personified neatness and by no way ironic but purely natural.



That's why I was in doubt.

Is it really you?

<She> passed by my desk on her way to her own.

At that time <she> whispered in a voice only audible to me.

"...Come to the back of the gym during lunch break. Don't run away."

I felt all my muscles tense up. Her words cut into my body like a sword. I gulped nervously.

I watched the well raised "elegant transfer student", who got chatted up as soon as she sat down.

There was no doubt.

"What are you doing here....?"

Without anyone there to answer my question, it fades into the air.

The only girl to know the answer--

The <Midnight killing Devil> just smiled peacefully.

Lunch break.

Usually I spend it eating my lunch and then sleeping the rest of the time, but today I had no choice but to abandon my planned out harmony.

The stale atmosphere behind the dim gym was void of people.

Kirisaki Kyouko wasn't here yet. Usually I would get angry for that after being called out, but today I was relieved. Seems I avoided a sudden confrontation.

I leaned against the wall, crossed my arms and thought about her intention.

If you think about it normally, the most likely possibility would be a threat. Like, 'If you tell someone about me, I won't let you off so easily'. But to her I'm already supposed to be dead. Yet here I am alive and kicking, what's more at the school she transferred to. It must have been quite the shock for her. But maybe she just thinks I'm a look-alike and called me out to confirm it.

But... I shifted my attention to another possibility. Kirisaki Kyouko said that she transferred due to her father's work. Is that really true? I thought of the <Midnight killing Devil's> area of operation. Because she killed all over Japan, the police had a hard time making a profile of her. What kind of person is it? What actions were taken and how? But what if.. If the killing Devil is a student, transfers

all over the place due to "father's work" and continues the murders at each place? Basically, she didn't keep on moving from place to place to avoid being caught, but because it's her original lifestyle. Then these strange patterns would make sense.

"I made you wait."

I heard that voice after I reached that conclusion. I look around.... There she was.

There stood Kirisaki Kyouko with her arms crossed and an overly keen smile, completely different from in the classroom.

"...I hate women, who made me wait. See ya."

I started to leave commanding. But, when I passed by her, Kirisaki grabbed my arm firmly.

"Don't run"

SILENCE. Kirisaki Kyouko stared at me with slightly opened eyes. Then she said.

"...Are you really the boy I killed back then?"

"You got the wrong person, I mean, what are you talking about, hahahahaha. Well, that's how it is. I gotta go, dragon ball is airing."

"I told you not to run away."

Oww Oww! My arm made a cracking sound! Cracking!

"I'll ask once more, are you the boy from back then?"

"....I'll say it once more: You.got.the.wrong.person."

I emphasized every word. Kirisaki Kyouko then gives a surprisingly meek answer with "I see". She might have really thought I'm just a look-alike. Man, don't scare me so much. Just when I thought I'm saved, Kirisaki Kyouko said a single phrase as it were the obvious development.

"Then let's try it out".

Come again? I didn't even had the time to ask that.

Without any hesitation, Kirisaki Kyouko flipped her skirt in a beautiful movement. The cloth fluttered lightly in the air. Beneath, in a lovely V-form, was a pure-white shorts with a bear print.

Wait, bear-panties!?

Time merciless went on as I was stunned. On her white and reasonable plump tight was a holster, which held a oversized sheath with a knife. The moment

Kirisaki Kyouko pulled it out,

I was stabbed.

“Guh”

Obviously caught off-guard, I let out a silly loud. Even if I’m immortal and even if I feel less pain than the average human, I would obviously let out a voice when I’m suddenly stabbed in the side by a knife that could easily kill a crocodile.

“....Hey, what the fuck are you doing!”

I protested while Kirisaki Kyouko pulled out the knife without a word. I could see blood coming out from the hole in my uniform. After a single “Mmh”, Kirisaki Kyouko grumbled,

“Interesting.”

Then hell broke loose.

While taking a stance with her knife, she slightly pushed me. Staggering, I retreated 2,3 steps. Then she jumped in. With just one step she was already in front of me. The same as yesterday, just what are her legs made of!?

SLASH.

Kirisaki Kyouko cut my sides, pulled back and then stabbed into my stomach without any hesitation. Stabbed. And stabbed. And stabbed again. This isn’t a mental problem anymore. She’s completely nuts. The speed she swung the knife at wasn’t normal. Just when I realized I was stabbed, she was already striking for the next one. If you were to compare it with a scene of a movie, where two swordsmen swiftly attack each others with rapiers, then it would certainly fit this situation. The stabbing continued. Stab after stab. It was totally one-sided. I had no chance to resist. I was gradually pushed backwards while blood gushed out with every single stab. Her expression stayed unchanged. Totally emotionless. Yesterday it was her liking. That’s why she smiled. Then what was it now? What was she trying out? That goes without saying. To see if I really was <immortal>. Her conclusion itself isn’t wrong. But the process to it is just the worst. Suddenly she stopped her hand. While still holding her knife, she was closely watching my head as if she was trying to confirm something. I was leaning my back against the gym wall and while calming my breath, I said,

“....What?”

“Around 35 times”.

She replied shortly. Of what?

“....35 times, I stabbed your damn body.”

Hey, hey, damn body? Come on.

"Actually, you talk quite different from when you introduced yourself."

"That just a facade. Everyone's creating a fake self so that their school life goes smoothly."

Oh really. I haven't done it though.

"...Nothing?"

"Nothing what!?"

Kirisaki Kyouko blinked. And after a small silence, she swung her knife, cleaning it from the blood. She flipped her skirt. Hello again, bear panties. Just stop it.

"Your answer already defies common sense. A normal human dies when stabbed 14 times."

What's with that precise number.

"I analyzed it. When you avoid any vital points, a sickly person dies after 9 stabs. A healthy child after 4 and a middle aged person after 11 stabs."

Thanks for that trivial information that I didn't even want to know and won't be any useful.

She sheathed her knife in her holster, mumbled "I see..." without any context and looked down. What the. Actually, what about my uniform! It's a total mess! There are still classes in the afternoon.

Considering to complain to her, I looked at her, but seeing her shoulders slightly trembling, I was shocked. Wh- What? Is she crying?

I don't get it. I'm the one who wants to cry. How am I going to explain this to my sister?

"Hey, you done now? You obviously noticed it already, but yes, for some reason I won't die. So, now that you know that, there are two problems."

I showed two fingers, then bended one of it, my index finger.

"First, what are you going to do about my uniform that got riddled by your totally crazy knife handling. You'll obviously compensate me, won't you. I want to inquire about that responsibility."

Next, I bended my middle finger.

"And the second one, well, that's the most important one-- Is about you, the <Midnight killing Devil>"

Kirisaki Kyouko's shoulder twitched. But that was all. I went on.

"It's you, isn't it? That cross wound inflicting serial killer. Maybe I should call it bad luck, but my sister works for the police. You're the offender and I'm the victim. I don't think I need to tell you what I will do, right?"

I drew closer to her. Taking into mind that she might run away now that she realized I'm not a look-alike, I carefully prepared to meet with whatever action she might take.

"What will you do? Will you turn in yourself? Whatever reason you might have had, what you did is unforgivable. Any sin has a designated place for it to be judged.....Well, I'm just quoting my sister here. Anyway, if you will turn in yourself, I'll refrain from reporting you."

Saying that, I reached out with my hand to Kirisaki Kyouko's shoulder—but stopped. She suddenly rose her head and stuttered "Wh- What" in surprise.

Kirisaki Kyouko was crying. Tears were spilling from her big eyes and falling onto the ground.

"....Crying won't do you anything. Sadly for you, I'm not so kind-hearted as to sympathize with a criminal—"

"...ful."

"Huh?"

What was that?

"...der...ful"

Kirisaki Kyouko said that, nearly whispering. I couldn't hear it well. I perked my ears. At that moment,

"—Wonderful!"

She raised her voice. Unlike from before, her expression was now a bright smile, like that of a kid, who just got his long desired robot toy.....Huh?

"You're wonderful! I was searching for someone with a power like yours! You're indeed my ideal man!"

She spread her arms and firmly grabbed my shoulders. Wh- What's with this development!? I was bewildered by her unexpected action.

"What's your name!"

"N-Node Kugito"

"I see! Node Kugito! No, Kugito!"

Don't call me by my given name!

Ignoring my outburst, she stared at me with a red face.

"Please, Kugito!"

"Please what. I'm afraid I can't really let you--"

"Go out with me!"

--Huh?

Without doubt I made a puzzled expression that could easily be considered top class in my relative long life of 17 years.

In that situation, she furthermore claimed fully excited,

"--Become my lover, Kugito!"

The red sun was slowly going down behind the ridge and forcing my eyes to shut. From the grounds you could hear the soccer and baseball club's training and the brass instrument class was playing some unknown classic piece. The broken speakers around the school were playing "The sun goes down behind the distant mountain" in a crackling voice.

It was after school.

On a square halfway to the school gate, I was watching the restless moving silhouette of a person. It stooped down all over the place and put whatever she got into something like a bag.

"What are you doing, Kuon."

I called out to her and like she only noticed me now, Kuon Rin answered in a surprised voice,

"Ah, Kugi-chan! ...Huh, why are you wearing a jersey?"

"Don't ask. The reason is deeper than the sea."

"Oh, you leaked a shit."

"That would still be better". Actually, a girl shouldn't say 'shit' so casually. "...So, what are you doing?"



"Mh? Oh, I'm picking up garbage."

Rin raised the garbage bag in her hand. Mh, certainly the half-transparent bag showed empty cans, juice packs, even a weekly manga magazine and a double-leaved 18+ book, which I would hesitate to buy.

Besides the fountain in the middle, the square also had benches, so during lunch break it was a resting place for the students. That in itself sounds good, but you can find imprudent guys anywhere, so even though there are plenty of garbage bins, there's always laying around trash that got thrown away by guys without manners. Various teachers, who witnessed that, appealed to all students to clean the square, but a certain parent reasoned that "the school, without any right to, forcing work on the student is a problem for the development of their independence" and that absurd belief turned it into a volunteer activity. Obviously, there wasn't anyone willing to do it, or so was my belief.

"You're doing it every day? Well done. You're so hard-working."

When I praised her, Rin scratched her head in embarrassment with a smile.

"Well, someone has to do it or it'll turn into a big dumpster. And then nobody would be able to eat here anymore. One hour after school isn't much work."

"I see. You're amazing."

I was impressed. I wouldn't help in such an ungrateful activity, but that were my honest feelings.

Rin's volunteer spirit is known nearly all over school and there are people who make fun of her behind her back for that. Rin doesn't badmouth anyone, gives up her seat in the train to elders without asking, guides people around, who have lost their way and throws away cigarettes that were dumped on the ground by someone. To any witness it might appear to be faked, because her kindness just goes overboard. A kindness obvious to everyone. A good-will obvious to everyone. Such a person is thought to be contrarious by others.

But Rin is just too innocent. That's why she doesn't hesitates. She helps others and does good deeds like it's a given.

If a kindness based on other's outlook is hypocrisy, then she clearly doesn't fall under that description. She doesn't consider anything of that. She's just doing it because she herself feels it's the right thing to do.

I was secretly admiring that innocence of hers. I don't mean to be arrogant, but the only people I have acknowledged are my sister and her. And they probably won't be any others. Though it's annoying when they become frolic with me.

"You're really amazing. Even though I think it's something anyone can do."

How many people are out there that won't use the excuse of "anyone can do it"? Just as less as there are people who convince themselves that "it has to be done by someone".

"...Need help?"

I asked that because I felt that it would leave a bad aftertaste otherwise. I believe such an action to be worth being called a good deed.

"Nah, it's fine. I'm already done.... By the way, Kugi-chan."

"What?"

Rin pointed at my right side in with a perplexed look.

"....When did you get a girlfriend?"

There it was. The topic I wished to be left untouched the most. Well, it's understandable.

"What's more, she—" Tilting her head, Rin was ascertain the situation. "is the transfer student, Kirisaki Kyouko-san... isn't she?"

"....Mm, well".

When I gave a vague answer, besides me— yes, even though I don't want to admit it, but besides me Kirisaki Kyouko, who had silently followed the conversation so far, smiled.

"Yes, that's right. Kuon Rin, was it?"

"Ah, yes. You already remembered my name. That's impressive."

"No, I haven't memorized all the names yet. It's just that I heard about you from Node-san."

"Ah, I see..... So?"

Rin looked at Kirisaki Kyouko, then at me and gave off a bold smile. It really pissed me off.

"So, could it be, you two are currently going out?"

"Well..."

Kirisaki Kyouko was looking down while putting her hands shyly on her cheeks, which suddenly got a red dyeing. It was even creepier than Jason in Saturday the 14th.

"E- Ehm, I'm aware that I just transferred here and it might be a bit impudent,

but.... Node-san was just.... uhm.... just t- too wonderful....”

Gyaaaaaaa! I didn’t even have anything to say back anymore! Just kill me here and now! Ah, wait, I can’t die!

“It’s fine, it’s fine. Time isn’t important for falling in love. I see, Kugi-chan finally got a girlfriend! Great!”

“No, it seems you’re under a great misunderstanding here. There isn’t a single sane person would take this girl as a girlfrOUCH!”

“Oh my, what’s the matter, Node-san?”

Kirisaki Kyouko asked me while she had her knife stabbed into me where Rin couldn’t see it. Stop it! Don’t twist it!

“What’s up, Kugi-chan?”

“N- No, you see, actually she (twist, twist) Gaaaah... It... It’s nothing....”

I gave up. Giving in to a threat is sure pathetic as the younger brother of a policewoman.

“Isn’t it time for us to go, Node-san?”

“...Y- Yeah, Kirisaki-san”. So take out the knife already. “.... See you, Kuon.” I gave my best to give off a small smile, as not to complicate things.

“Okay. See you.”

Rin was looking a bit perplexed, but she answered and waved her hand. I waved back and turned around. At the same time Kirisaki Kyouko, who had hidden behind my back with a carefree expression, pulled out the knife. Then we started walking. Sticking close to me by linking arms, she concealed my wound. She’s a professional. Though I don’t know at what.

“....Hey.”

After we got away a good distance from Rin, I broke the silence.

“What?”

She answered in voice completely different from before. Her switch of character was on par with a veteran actress.

“....Normally, in such a situation, one would step me on the foot, no? Why a stab? Why would you stab me?”

“But... But... I just love stabbing.”

No buts! Don't try to act cute!

"Well, don't take it to heart. Also, from now on I'll stab you without mercy when you try to expose my identity. I'll gauge ya."

"....Sure. Actually, say."

"Mh?"

"Are you serious about what you said at lunch break?"

After blinked a few times, she answered,

"I am"

"...Why would I have to go out with you? Besides, you still haven't answered my two questions from back then, though it couldn't be helped there since the chime rang."

"An, that."

Looking up the dawning sky, she mumbled,

"To be honest, I don't want to be arrested."

"So naive. If you don't change that attitude, I'll report you instantly, regardless of any threats from you."

"Chill out. Let me finish."

Then let's hear it.

"...There's one way for me to avoid arrest and for you to be satisfied."

"As if such a convenient way exists."

"It does."

After saying that, she tilted her head.

"Where's your house?"

"Stay away."

"We can hardly proceed our conversation when I didn't even know where my boyfriend lives."

"I keep telling you, I haven't agreed to that."

"Then come to terms with it. I want to talk somewhere alone."

"Won't an alley close by do?"

"You're going to rape me? There's an order to things."

"Is your brain a sponge, or what?"

"Are you praising me for having a brain where the information seeps in easily?"

Just how positive can she be.

"It means you're an idiot, whose brain is full of holes. Anyways, I won't let you into my house."

Kirisaki Kyouko sighed.

"....Can't be helped. Let's go to my house."

"That I refuse to do, too".

"Don't be selfish. I'll stab you, Actually, let me stab you."

"....You just want to stab me by all means, don't you?"

"Hahahahaha. Let's go."

Huh? She ignored my question?

"I won't eat you. On the contrary, I'm quite sweet in bed."

"My head hurts...."

Kirisaki Kyouko looked at me puzzled, when I pressed on my temples.

The apartment was a not so long walkable distance away from our Public Meitou Academy. Build some decades ago, the building was brittle, the wall had cracks and the whole building was covered in an unbelievable amount of ivy. It looked like monster would appear here or rather it would be strange for them to not appear.

".....You live here?"

"Yep"

We climbed up the stairs that seemed to break down at every step. That was a bit surprising. She's rather poor, I guess?

"Where are you parents?"

"My mom's dead and I'm not living with my dad."

"So you're living alone, huh."

Then I noticed something strange. Didn't she mention her "father's work" as the reason for her transfer?

"I'll explain about that too. Come in."

Answering me like that, she stopped in front of the nearest room on the second floor. She turned the knob and opened the door.

I hesitated for a moment, then sighed after seeing her urging me in.

Then I set foot into the room of the killing Devil.

It was a room with surprisingly few furniture. The kitchen and refrigerator aside, there was a Kotatsu in the middle, a small television at the wall and a closet. That's all. Only the notebook on the Kotatsu was standing out in this oddly plain room.

"You live quite simple."

"I prefer it simple...is what I would like to say, but I just don't have the money."

"Your family?"

"No, I myself. My father pays for my school tuition, but I pay for all the rest myself. I can't waste money."

"You're supporting yourself?"

"I work part-time."

But part-time jobs for students are marginal. Sure, this apartment is old, but still nothing a job that goes on for a few hours after school could pay for.

"....You're a nice guy."

She suddenly said, then laid out a cushion and pointed me sit down.

"My first time being called that."

"Then maybe ignorant fits better?"

She went into the kitchen, poured water in a kettle, put it on the gas stove and turned it on. After a few clicks the gas finally ignited, revealing that it was quite old.

"....What do you mean?"

I put my legs under the Kotatsu. It was only turned on just now, so it was still cold.

"There's no need to play by the rules when you're in need for money. Specially for

women.”

An unpleasant image flashed in my head.

“....So it’s like that”

“You condemn me now?”

“Well, my sister would have given you a lecture now. But I believe in ‘demand determines supply’. As long as you don’t have any regrets, it’s not something for me to butt in.”

“I see. That’s a good mindset.”

“But why do you have to go that far? Just let your father pay for it.”

Kirisaki Kyouko sat down in front of me. My feet started to get warmer.

“It’s my way of drawing the line.”

“Drawing the line?”

“I believe that one has to shoulder an equivalent risk when straying from the path. When committing a crime, it’s obvious to be prepared for getting arrested, but if regardless of that one still wants to repeat the crime, another kind of shackle is needed for oneself.”

“So that’s why you live alone, apart from your father, and earn you money with compensated dating.”

“Who said that I’m doing compensated dating?”

“Huh? But you just said it yourself, that there’s no need to play after the rules when in need for money.”

“I said that, but that wasn’t really limited to compensated dating. Well, I’m doing something familiar, but I never said anything close to what you were imagining.”

“I- Is that so”

Then just say so from the beginning! I’m incredible embarrassed at myself for jumping to conclusions and turning pink!

“Puberty, huh, Kugito.”

Stop with that “I get it, you’re at that age. It can’t be helped” face that says you like you understand everything! That’s what hurts me the most!

“Ufufu”

Don’t lauuuugh!

"Enough of that. While I'm at it, let me tell you that I don't plan to go to university. After graduating high school I will cut all ties with my father and just live out my life reasonable with a part-time job like I'm doing now."

"....You wouldn't last with that."

"What comes that comes. I'll just die in the fields then."

"That's your idea of drawing the line?"

"Well, yeah."

Stupid. I shock my head.

"That's just self-satisfaction. What you should be doing first is to hand in yourself."

"I would guess so. I have nothing to object. I'm doing it while fully aware of it. So.

"So?"

"I want you to become my boyfriend."

"How does it turn out like this?" How does she reach that conclusion.

"I'll explain that now."

Kirisaki Kyouko put her hand onto her chin and her gaze faded off in deep thought. Then,

"...Let's see. First I' should start explaining about myself."

She said with a nod after a certain silence.

"First off, like you said, I'm the recently discussed serial killing Devil. Seems people on the internet got really excited about it and gave me the name <Midnight killing Devil>."

I knew of that before already, but hearing it directly from herself feels just so unreal for some reason. The girl in front of me sure had her screwed up parts, but she didn't look like a bizarre serial killer that killed numerous of people. Then how would such a person look like? For example: Always carrying a chainsaw. Or having cloudy eyes. Or always talking in puzzles. Someone like that would be fitting, but it's questionable if such a person would really exist. No, even if he does exist, it would be wrong to label him a criminal immediately. I'm afraid most criminals world-wide are living their lives normally like the girl in front of me does. That's somewhat scary.

"Right now, I'm known throughout the world as a criminal with a fancy for bizarre murders—The so called 'Psycho Killer'. But I myself believe that I'm not like that."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you cut meat before?"

....What the?

"Well, yeah. But what about it?"

"Your impression?"

"Huh?"

"How did it feel to cut meat?"

"How you ask... Nothing special. I just cut the meat. That's all." Actually, is there any person who holds a special feelings towards cutting meat?

"There is. Me."

Kirisaki Kyouko put her hands under the Kotatsu, pulled out the knife from her holster with a clicking sound and put it on the table.

"A change of topic, did you ever have sex?"

"That's quite the jump."

"It's a roundabout way, but it's important. Answer."

"....I haven't."

These days it isn't unusual to lose your virginity with seventeen, but unlikely the guys in my class, I'm not permanently aroused all year. So far I hadn't had any interest in girls, nor did I feel any urge for said intercourse. Though let me add that I'm by no means homosexual. As proof,

"Then have you masturbated before?"

"....Well, yeah."

There you have it. I'm a normal healthy high school boy.

"So, how's that related to our previous conversation? I surely hope you didn't just want to embarrass me."

"There's that too, but don't worry, there's a meaning to it."

"I'm plenty worried, seeing that it was part of it. Is that your fetish?"

"Verbal taunting is proper method, you know?"

Of what!?

"...Now then, normally sex, or alternatively masturbating is done to experience sexual pleasure. The peak of that is called orgasm or climax and because it feels good, most people either play with themselves or use their partner's openings. You following?"

"Yeah, but..." I'm following, but "hearing a girl my age talk about masturbating, sex, orgasm and openings with a straight face is quite depressing."

"What, you like them all shyly? Say so earlier. So, to what extent? The virgin type that doesn't even want to show her breasts? Or when her pus—"

"Forget it and just go on."

"....Okay. Well, I'll hear it from you in detail later. So, ultimately all people do the same stuff, but reaching that state depends on the individual and is divided into various cases. When there are people who can only get it on with women with huge breasts, then the opposite is also true. When there are people who only accept men or women in their prime years, then there are also people who only get excited over children that haven't grown any hair down there."

"The so called lolicon, huh"

I said with a slightly disgusted voice. Maybe influence by my sister, who works in the department responsible for juvenile crime, but I have a hidden hate towards that kind of person.

"You seem to be at a misunderstanding, so let me tell you: The lolita complex is nothing but a simple disposition. Without doubt, loving an innocent boy or girl easily tends to make one look like a fiend, but most people stop at simple admiration and are satisfied with either 2D or 3D adult videos, or failing this keep themselves in check. The mindset that lolicon/shotacon equals criminal is rude towards these people, who are making an effort every single day. It's the same as that a sadistic man or woman doesn't go around assaulting random people."

"...I see. I follow most of it."

"Good that you're so understanding. Let's continue. The disposition, or complex, of these people is called a <fetish>."

I made an expression that said "So what?", so Kirisaki Kyouko said,

"Mine is most likely killing."

"What?"

"Most people just think 'Oh, I cut the meat' when they cut meat and that's it. But for me, the sensation of the knife cutting through meat and the following blood splashing gives me a sexual pleasure I can't resist. To be frank, I'm confident that I could cum by just cutting meat."

That's too frank.

"...As a kid, I could calm down my urges by cutting simple cooking meat. But with time passing by, my craving escalated. One day I found a mouse at home by chance. When I caught her, I thought "How would it feel to cut her?". The dead meat so far already felt so good, so a living one should bring me a greater, different kind of excitement. So I chopped up the mouse out of curiosity. It was the best. A stimulation I never felt before ran through my body. It's difficult to describe. I was smitten from tip to toe....There was "something" that I can't describe with words within me."

First she started killing animals. At first were mice, then the hamster she kept, followed by sparrows, crows and pigeons in the neighbours. Then she slowly switch to lagers one like cats and dogs.

"I buried all the corpses. I was worried what might happen if I was found out, but my strong desire drove me forward."

Cutting the stomach, gauging the flesh, taking out the innards, lining them up all disassembled and indulging herself in the lovely view.

"...."

Suddenly a sound from the boiling kettle broke the atmosphere. Kirisaki Kyouko stood up swiftly and went into the kitchen. After a moment, she put down cups with tea in front of me and her. Though not entirely, I didn't feel like drinking it. Just like she guessed my feelings, she took her cup and drank first.

"And then"

She put down her cup. THUD.

"—I got the desire to kill humans."

She didn't remember the turning point. She thinks it might have been from seeing an anatomic model on some experiment show on the education channel or from a disassembling illustration in a cooking book.

"The only thing for certain is that I couldn't stop myself. I chopped up countless animals. All that was left was a living being like myself. Of course I understood that there would be no turning back once I did that. That's why I hesitated. At the age where my classmates were excited about love and friendship, every day I was just thinking about stabbing a person."

Wondering how much pleasure it would give her to plunge a blade into a big body, pierce the flesh and letting the blood gush out. With time she couldn't suppress the urge, that started to grow in her, anymore.

"....The first time I killed a human was three years ago— When I was in 8th

grade.”

Anyone was fine her target. Introduced by a bad friend, it seems she was doing a compensated dating imitation since then. Seeing a middle-aged salary man walking with her, who was younger by more than ten years, all happily made her think “He might be a good target”.

“Cutting a person—felt great.”

Better than anything she cut before. An irresistible pleasure that was hard to oppose, passed through her body. She didn’t care about the man’s terrified expression at all. Her aim was to cut. To stab. To gauge. To pierce. That was all.

“I think that action let me enjoy myself several times better than simple sex. I climaxed immediately... Numerous times, while knowing that I’m the worst.”

After that.

After that she couldn’t forget that experience.

“That’s.... how you became a serial killer, huh”

I let out a gloomy sigh. The story made you depressing just from hearing it.

“... I had no choice.”

“But to kill?”

“No. ...Humans are weak. They die when you stab them. It’s not like I wanted to kill them. But... they just died.”

Kirisaki Kyouko drooped and stared at her hands on the Kotatsu blanket.

“You have no right to claim that as having no choice.”

On my words, she rose up her head. Then she fiercely glared at me, but quickly lowered her head again.

“....I know.”

I know, she mumbled.

“No excuses, no shackles on me will change the fact that I’m atrocious criminal. I’m aware of that...But, I can’t stop. I just can’t stop.”

Before she appeared brave, but now she had shrunk. Her arms were wrapped around herself, her gaze was averted and she was biting her lips.

“I asked my father to transfer me over to a new school with some random excuse after a fixed period. My father prioritized work and was the kind of guy who says

"I'm raising you since I'm responsible for bringing you into this world, but there's no love for you in me. So my weird wishes or question—everything that had to do with me, must have been a pain for him—were left unanswered."

"Really...So by transferring all over the county, you confused the police, huh."

With a small nod, she said,

"Kugito, what you say is right. I should hand in myself to the police. But...to be honest, I was scared. Not of being caught. Even if I were caught and were to be temporarily released after getting a revision for juvenile delinquency....I would still repeat the pattern. I can't suppress my desire. Just like you can't forbid people from having sex, there's no way to stop me from stabbing....That's what I'm scared of."

"...Even so, I can't let you go."

"Of course not....That's why I planned to obediently offer my life when I get caught. But."

"But?"

She slowly looked up to me.

"....I met you."

"Me?"

"When I saw you, who I supposedly killed, in the class I transferred to, I was surprised, but at the same time had a fine hope. 'Maybe...' and then 'Don't tell me', I thought. It couldn't be, but...It actually could?"

"Could what?"

"You—"

She gulped and with a nervousness totally untypical for her, she asked me,

"are <immortal>, aren't you?"

"...."

I somewhat knew where this was going, so I didn't want to answer. But I couldn't endure her gaze filled with expectation. So I soon moved my chin.

"Mm...that's right"

"So it's true...."

She closed her eyes to think about something. Then she mumbled "Good", opened

her eyes and stood up in one action. She bowed down deeply.

"I once again ask you....Please go out with me."

"....I see, that's how it is."

I saw that coming and lost all words.

"Even if you don't love me, let me at least stay at your side. When you get a girlfriend, I won't bother you when you're with her. But promise me that you will be there for me when I need you. When you allow me to stay by your side, I'll vow never to kill another person. Please. I—"

Bending down, she grabbed my hand and begged me with a desperate expression.

"I need you."

"....Even if you say that..."

I put my free hand on my forehead and lamented over this unbelievable development.

Lovers with a killer? And only to get stabbed? Where's the gain for me in that?

"....It's a no?"

But....From what I just heard, she obviously needs me. Not the unreal <need> between lovers that you see in dramas or movies, but in it's literal meaning. Without me, she would certainly break soon.

One part of me said to just leave her be. She killed numerous people. Even if she's caught, she will start killing again once she's released. So what? In time she'll get the death sentence and it'll be over. It doesn't concern me at all.

That's certainly true. From the routes I should take, it's the safest one for me.

But on the other hand, there's a part of me that can't abandon her. It wasn't really sympathy, more something close to a parental feeling.

She also thinks of herself as an unwanted human. That's why she separated herself from her father and is spending a third-class lifestyle. She's the same as me.

My sister's dream as a kid was it to become a novelist. For that purpose she read a lot of books, studied plenty and gathered knowledge.

But that dream was scattered with my birth. To protect her little brother that was receiving abuse from the father, my sister chose to become a policewoman instead of a novelist. If I didn't exist, my sister might have become a world-wide renowned writer. Even if not, she would have been at least something that she

truly wanted to be herself.

My existences warped someone else's life.

I knew since long ago that I'm unwanted.

Without me being born, my father might have lived happily together with my mother and sister.

Yeah, from the beginning I was a human that no one wished to be alive.

That's the reason I have this weird power.

I lost hope in that.

But she— Kirisaki Kyouko still couldn't give up herself.

That's why she's begging me.

I knew that not out of arrogance.

"...."

I sighed.

....Saving people isn't my style. But—Now that I have met her, I might get away with claiming to have had no other choice.

I said,

"Okay."

If someone like me can be of use, then use me.

"....I'll go out with you."

On my words, she showed a bright smile for the first time since we met.

I drank my tea, that became completely cold.

It tasted horribly bitter.

"The world sure is peaceful..."

A single man in the darkness. There wasn't much furniture, just spread out newspapers in the needlessly big room.

The paper was reporting about recent incidents. A mother killed her five year old daughter with an axe. A grandfather repeatedly sexual abused his grandchild. An assault by a stranger for the stupid reason of "You bought what I was just going to buy", which ended in murder. A man, who lived together with his dead lover for

more than three years, believing she would come back to life.

And repeatedly, a serial killing by the <Midnight killing Devil>.

"Really, so peaceful. Killing and getting killed out of stupid or nonsensical reasons just shows it's serene. A world where the majority of crimes are committed out of "inevitable situations" like fighting over food or being ordered by a superior, is way more dangerous."

Mumbling so by himself, the man laughed quietly. Crossing his legs, he reached out for the coffee on the table. After one sip he made a grumpy face.

"....It's cold."

A discreet small knock echoed.

"Come in."

The light from the floor enlightened the room slightly. A silhouette entered without any sound and closed the door behind it.

"Was there some movement?"

"Yes. An interesting one at that."

Opposite from the contents, the voice was really monotone and echoed through the broad room.

"Hoo, what is it?"

"<Jack>, who's under surveillance, made contact with a boy."

"So what about it? Everyone is bound to make contact with someone if they spent a normal lifestyle."

"But it wasn't a normal encounter."

The man rose one eyebrow and closed the newspaper. Throwing it on the table, he opened his hand.

"Let's hear it."

"The <Entrails of the Deathspirit>"

The man let slip a "Hoo" from his mouth.

"You're saying those two met, huh. Now that's quite unfortunate."

"That's not all. It seems the two of them became lovers."

The man's eyes widened for a bit.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, it's confirmed."

"Wow...."

The man looked down and put a hand on his forehead. Then he let out a voice. At first it was quiet, but it grew over time. A happy snicker.

"The world sure is interesting."

"One more matter."

"Mh?"

"Another <Jack> made his move."

"Hoo."

Dropping his body deep into the chair, the man waved his wand. "Go on".

"It seems he has restarted his activities that he put on a hold before. For now there's one victim, but it probably won't end at that. What should we do about it?"

"Mmm...."

The man moved his hand to his chin and deep in thought, he remained silent. After a while, he opened his mouth.

"I thought it would be difficult to scout the first <Jack>, but the situation has changed. I can see hope now."

"You mean?"

"<Jack> found light. If you present salvation to those who were drowning in darkness, they'll become attached. The time has come for an invitation."

"Then I'll arrange everything."

"Ah, wait."

The man looked up to the ceiling with a snarl. Then he raised a finger.

"I got a nice idea."

"Yes."

"Who do you think would win between a lion and an animal-type machine that copies a lion?"

"I don't understand the meaning of your question."

"Don't take it too complicated."

It followed a small pause. Then a dry voice could be heard.

"The real lion, I take."

"Your reason?"

"A wild animals has <instinct>, something a computer cannot match up to. Out of a hundred runs, the AI can only operate the same action, while the animal in exchange for imprecise movements, can counter from unexpected situations."

"And that will lead to victory?"

"It is a possibility."

"I see. But you know, in the past there was a match between a chess computer, who learned a million moves, and a famous chess genius. Who do you think won?"

"...The genius?"

"It was the computer."

The man laughed. It echoed loud within the room.

"Basically, it means we won't know what happens until we try it. Who do you think is stronger? The genius or someone who copied the genius?"

"...."

"Don't you find it interesting?"

Then the man said what was to be done. The silhouette nodded on the brief instructions.

"But... What if the first <Jack> fails?"

"We'll deal with it then. According to the circumstances, you know."

"I understand. Then initiate it as such."

"Please do. Ah, also, my coffee is cold. Can you bring me a new one?"

"I'm not your secretary, so please do it yourself."

"...It wouldn't hurt you to."

"Excuse me."

The silhouette bowed and left.

"So not cute.... No, that's another kind of cuteness? Whatever. It's gotten... quite interesting."

The man smirked and grabbed the remote control on the table. He pressed the switch.

At that moment the wall flashed and became a display.

There a single girl was shown.

A gaze that pierced you. White skin. A small body that hid a wonderful physical strength. The display was showing the girl talking with a boy.

"Now then—Will you be able to win?"

The man mumbled with a little smile.

"Genius killer—Kirisaki Kyouko".

Blood dropped from the knife in his hand and made a red puddle on the asphalt. A swing send fresh blood flying and the blade made a dull sound upon hitting the wall. The same action was repeated over and over. Over and over with no end. Every time the knife clinked and blood flew around. It was just like the blade was weeping.

"Oh Lord..."

A man on the ground before him. He was laying on his back feeble and limp. He was no longer breathing and his body had countless wounds. All of them were caused by his knife and ended his life.

A pleasure was running through his whole body. The sweet sensation spread from his tip to toe. His body was filled with delight.

"....Aw, my Lord".

Speaking with a croaky voice, he cowered down. Grabbing the knife with both hands, he took aim.

He waited until his hands stopped shaking and then took a big swing.

A dull sound. A new wound was engraved onto the corpse of the man.

He cut the body vertically, is if he were to stab pull it. There was resistance in the flesh, but thinking of it as part of the ceremony made it no effort.

Next he pulled out the knife and determined the middle of the vertical cut he made. He stabbed into the right side of it. Then he pulled the knife he held with both hand to the side with the least possible sound while the blood gushed out.

A cross was engraved into the man's body. A cross like Christ was carrying for his crucifixion at Golgotha. The absolute existence that forgave all sins. The crest connecting to god.

"Oh Lord—"

He mumbled.

"Did you....die?"

He stood up and looked down on the man. He did a cross with his hands when he looked at the pitiable victim that was nothing more than a pile of flesh now.

"No regret— I have no regret..."

He looked up to the sky with closed eyes for a while.

"But—Now that you're dead, someone has to take your place... Yes, the person closest to you has to—"

He mumbled once again.

"Oh Lord—When you are the parent and we are your children, then someday the children have to surpass their parent. And now is the time for it."

He slowly started walking with firm steps.

"Surpassed by a human, you're no longer— a god. The human who surpassed god —will become a new god."

Become a god. Become a god. Become a god. Become a god. Become a god.

He repeatedly muttered to himself and put his knife away.

"But— I don't know how. I don't know. I don't know..."

At that time.

A mechanical bell rang from his pocket.

He put his hand into the pocket and pulled it out. The display of the cell phone was shining. It had been months, no, years since he was contacted by the outside world.

A single mail. An unknown sender. He was wary, but what was there to worry about? He cracked a small smile and opened the mail.

It contained one short sentence.

"God is dead."

Then a new mail. He moved his fingers and opened it.

As expected it was a plain single sentence.

“Then who killed him?”

With no time to write an answer, yet another mail came.

The man’s mouth formed a smile. It was a deformed and creepy smile.

Following was written in the mail.

“—You’ll kill him.”

Below more information was written. The man read those and closed the cell phone. He broke out in an uncontrollable laughter. It went on and on.

“God will die—- I’ll kill him—-Revenge against you—- for falling down miserably to the earth—-And then—”

The street was covered in silence.

<He> started heading for his destination.

Chapter 03: Immortal Boy and the unknown Killer

It's been around two weeks since Kirisaki Kyouko and I have become lovers.

Kirisaki had already blended into the class and probably due to her special lady act, she had even become popular with other students. The advantage of putting up a brave front.

As for me, I was the same as ever. The rumour of Kirisaki and me dating already spread throughout the school and a few guys in class teased me about it, but I just glared at them without saying a word and they shut up. The advantage of not putting up a brave front.

"Now then..."

It was lunch break and I stood up with my lunchbox in hand.

"Node-san!"

Ugg. A soft voice that sounded disgusting and fake to even those who don't know the truth.

"Let's eat together."

As expected, the one who draw closer to me was a demon emitting a sweet fragrance. It was Kirisaki Kyouko.

"Nah, I'm not eating lunch. I'm the type that lives on by eating mist".

"Again with your jokes, Ufufu."

"No, for real. I'll return to mother earth. I belong to the believers of spirits."

...You hate eating with me that much?"

Kirisaki lowered her look with teary eyes. There it was! The sure-kill crying trap!

"I see. Eating together with someone like me sure is displeasing... Ugh, Ughhh"

Damn schemer. She was just crying meaningless, she was appealing by trying to hold back every single drop of her tears as best as she could. The glances from my classmates hurt.

"...I get it."

The moment I answered that, suddenly radiated like a blooming flower and with a "Thank you!" she hugged onto me, not caring about those around us. Tumult aroused around us.

"Kirisaki-kun"

"What is it, Node-san?"

"...Stop stabbing me into the back as an extra to the hug."

"Oh my, what do you mean? I have no clue, fufufufu."

Like I said, stop twisting it!

"....Your flesh is really fantastic. The perfect sensation of resistance when I stab you is just magnificent.... I got a bit wet."

I would love to record this obscene words, which were mumbled in a small voice, on tape.

"Hey, Kuon-kun."

It was then when I heard a sharp voice.

While being hugged (and stabbed) by the rapturous Kirisaki, I looked over there.

Kuon was confronting two female students.

"This isn't what I ask for."

One of the girls raised the bread in her hand.

"Mine too. I clearly said orange juice. And this is apple juice."

The other girl held the juice carton in front of Rin, when Rin lowered her head.

"S- Sorry. The orange one was sold out. Same for the bread...."

"Keep it together. At least get a little errand done right."

"....Yeah, I'm sorry. I know. I'll be more careful next time."

"Fine. We'll count on you then."

The girl with the juice patted Rin's head while snickering.

"After all you're a 'good girl', who can't refuse any favours."

Rin made a wry smile and nodded slightly.

"Thank you, really. It's quite convenient."

While waving around the bread, the other girl laughed.

The two of them left with a "See you~" while laughing shrill.

Rin was waving at them, but when they were out of sight, she became so depressed that you felt sorry for her.

"...Kirisaki, excuse me for a bit."

"What it is? I want to feel your warmth a bit longer..."

Don't put your finger into the wound on my back while saying that!

I gave the students, who were looking at us curiously, a glare. Just with that they averted their eyes and scattered into small groups.

The attention on me was gone, so I approached Rin. Kirisaki was following behind me.

"Kuon"

Rin looked my way. Then as always, she smiled like she just had remembered something.

"Ah, Kugi-chan...."

"What's up?"

"No, nothing. It's just that I couldn't buy what Nogi-san and Sakurano-san asked me to buy."

Nogi and Sakurano were surely the names of the two female students from earlier. I was impressed that she remembered her names, or rather something might be wrong with me, who still hasn't remember most of my classmate's names by the end of the second year.

"Did you offer it by yourself to go buy it, Kuon-san?"

When Kirisaki asked that, Rin shook her head.

"They gave me the money and told me to buy it. But I have this small body. I can't get into the crowd before the store. So I couldn't fulfil their request. ...It's only obvious that they would get angry."

"They just pushed that onto you. Are you fine with being used like that?"

Rin made a perplexed look.

"With what?"

"I'm saying that you're their errand girl. Are you fine with that?"



Tilting her head, Rin said as she didn't get what I said.

"Why wouldn't I? Buying it doesn't take all that much time. Rather, it's quite distressing not being able to eat what you want. I have to try harder next time."

"....Now really."

More than I was angry, I was weary, so I unintentional let out a big sigh.

"You're just an idiot for being so good-natured."

"Aw, how mean."

"But it's not like they have some special circumstances that don't allow them to go to the store themselves, right? So I think they should by the things they wants to eat by themselves..."

"Just like she said. I'm not going to say anything about your kindness, but you need to be more careful or you'll be taken advantage of."

"Really? I wonder."

Rin crossed her arms and pondered. But soon enough she said with a smile.

"Well, it's fine. I helped those two."

....She's beyond help. A good girl with muscles for a brain.

I tilted my head with a sigh and told her "Anyway, be more careful. Next time they behave like earlier, call me over" and headed with Kirisaki to the rooftop.

"You're strangely concerned about that girl."

Kirisaki said while munching on her crimson sweet bread. The package, which made you wonder if it had wine in it, had written "Entrails Taste" on it with letters in a transpiring horror colour. Just where did she buy that.

"I am?"

I shoved a fried egg of my lunch into my mouth. Today they tasted heavily of salmon flake. Well done if I may say so myself. Delicious.

"Usually you treat others like trash, yet you went to her and gave her some advice. I'm a bit worried."

"What do you take me...."

"Am I wrong?"

Well, she isn't exactly wrong.

While putting a pea with peanuts sauce into my mouth, I nodded. It was frustrating how I couldn't deny that.

"Well, her type is rare these days. She's a good girl, but too much of that, so she's being taken advantage of."

"The age where honest people are seen as idiots, huh. Reminds me, she also changes the water for the flower in the classroom, doesn't she."

"Let me add that she also comes early to school to polish everyone's desk. Most people would think she has some hidden motive. Even I did. But she isn't that smart to scheme something like that. I came to know that."

"I see."

"But no one notices it. They all take it for granted that their desk are clean, the flower gets new water and that there's no trash laying around. Despite that, they use her as some lackey while knowing that she's a 'good girl'. Seeing that just doesn't suit well with me."

Kirisaki finished her bread and pulled out a pet bottle filled with some red fluid. I thought it was blood, but it turn out to be simple grape juice. How misleading.

"You like her?"

"Hm?"

"No, I'm sorry. Forget that I asked that."

Kirisaki took off the cap from the juice. took one gulp and then shook her head.

"You're free to fall in love or date whoever you want. That was our contract from the beginning."

Surely she had noticed that she made a displeased face despites her words.

"That's why I'm not concerned whatever feelings you have for her. Yeah. So you don't have to concern yourself with it either and just treasure these feelings."

"Kirisaki"

"Mh? —Hau."

With my chopsticks I put a meatball into the mouth of Kirisaki, who looked my way. The surprised Kirisaki closed her mouth and chewed for a while, then said a single word.

"...Delicious."

"Don't get jealous."

I smiled faintly and ate my rice with furikake.

"I- I'm not jealous or anything."

"Rest assured. It's nothing like love. I'm just kinda envious."

I looked up to the sky. It had annoying blue colour today again.

"I'm just trash, so she seems just too radiant. Though I don't believe I can become like her, I believe I should be like her. So I always help her on reflex."

"...I see."

"Don't worry about this trivial stuff. By the way, you haven't done it lately, have you."

When I said that, Kirisaki answered "Of course" and ducked her chin.

"After I met you, I made a vow and haven't it done at all since then."

"Well, okay then. But how many people have you done in so far?"

I asked out of curiosity, when Kirisaki stared into space for a while and then answered "...I don't remember."

"There are times when I just can't hold back myself. My memories is vague for around thirty minutes at these times. I somewhat remember it, but it doesn't feel real to me. If I had to describe it, it's like I'm watching myself on a TV. When I came back to my sense, there's a corpse in front of me."

So she isn't doing it with a full consciousness. A creepy story. Kirisaki is killing people unconsciousness and then is confronted with the corpse without any preparation.

"...And I always regret it afterwards. I feel relieved, but a guilty feelings still remains."

Sounds just like masturbating.

"I hate myself the most at these times. I don't know how I should handle this feeling. So I force myself to forget about the victim..... I know that's selfish of me."

"...Well, I won't pry too much. But well, I'm surprised you could pull that off all over the country."

"...About that, there's something on my mind."

"Mh?"

"Well, it just might be my imagination. It's simply a matter of a possibility."

"Just come out with it."

When I looked at her questioning, Kirisaki opened her mouth halfway, but closed it immediately again.

"...It's nothing certain. And it didn't happen lately, so it's not really worth talking about."

"Then don't bring it up."

"Right, sorry. ...By the way."

"What?"

"Do you remember my earlier words?"

"Which?"

Kirisaki crumpled up the package of the bread she finished earlier and put it into the pocket of her skirt.

Then she drunk up the grape juice and put it on the ground.

" `There are times when I just can't hold back myself' "

Then she pulled up her skirt, allowing me to peek at her well-known bear-patterned panties, and pulled out the knife from her holster. ...Hold it. My instincts were telling me with all their might to run away.

"Kugito... Can I?"

Kirisaki's eyes were directed at me and were clouded by desire. She made an expression like an embarrassed maiden with flushed cheeks.

"Stop. You couldn't be..."

"I could. That half-assed stab to your back earlier turned on my gears."

"Hey, wai--"

Kirisaki jumped at me. I was pushed to the ground hopelessly and Kirisaki rode on top of me.

Kirisaki erotically licked her lips and ran her finger along my neck. She whispered to me, who was shivering.

"I'll have you... take responsibility."

Then I was attacked. Quite literally.

The horny stabbing demon called Kirisaki Kyouko stabbed me around 16 times and

in the end petted my wounds. It was an experience not even a maniac suffered and seeing as I was no M, it was merely a adversity to me. I felt like taking a shower while crying.

Nevertheless, I forgave her and after school I parted with the strangely satisfied Kirisaki and quietly went home by myself. I realized how generous I was.

She took off my uniform beforehand, so I avoided the tragedy of having it riddled, but the countless wounds on my body were covered with scurf and hadn't healed completely yet, so I would surely have a hard time when I took a bath.

Thinking of how I had to stick with her from now on, made me quite soulful, but I stayed optimistic and thought that I would get used to it in time. Guess it's the influence from my sister that I can adapt my thoughts so easily. Then I suddenly remember that it was the end of the week and I immediately was filled with excitement about the holiday from tomorrow on. I would prefer that you don't call me simple, but blessed with the ability to adapt to situations.

Encouraging myself like that, I turned the knob and opened the door....Oh? It wasn't locked.

When I looked around the entrance hall, I found laying my sister's things and shoes scattered around.

I tidied up her stuff, took off my own shoes and entered the house.

I could hear the sound of the TV from the living room.

"Sis, you're home?"

I opened the curtain while asking, when I saw my sister eating a deluxe Sukiyaki lunch box while watching TV.

"Welham hom."

"You're eating that again. You need to eat vegetables too or your bones will turn frail."

"It's convenient how meat immediately gives you power. You're home early."

"I have nothing to do once class ends after all."

"How sad. When I was in high school, I was more...."

"More what?"

"...Reminds me, you were doing three part-time jobs for living expenses, right? Such a gloomy youth."

"Thanks for your concern."

"You're welcome. Don't you have a girlfriend? You're at that age. Go on a date after school or so. I'll be sure to trail you."

"First time I see someone announce the trailing beforehand. And I don't have a girlfriend."

It's better I don't mention that I'm being chased by some weird girl. For own sake. And for the standpoint of my sister.

"You're home early too, Sis. What's up?"

"Ah, I slipped away for a bit. I'll go back once I finished eating this."

"I see."

I took the black tea from my sister and gulped it down.

"Ah, watch was that for!"

"You keep getting fatter since you only drink sweet stuff like this."

"I- I'm not getting fat!"

"Right, you're just plump."

"Yep, yep, I'm popular for my cute round face."

"That's just a roundabout way to say you have chubby cheeks."

A carrot with sauce came flying at me. How clever of her to throw the stuff at me that she hates.

"...Onto the next news."

Then the announcer spoke with a stiff tone while looking at his script.

"Another of these incidents."

I simply looked at the screen. And then I was horrified.

"Today in the early morning a man, who had collapsed on the street, was found by a woman on her way to work in **City ** District. The man's body was cut with something sharp like a knife and the man was already dead. His chest was covered with a big cross-shaped wound, so the police investigate particularly with regards to the serial killer incidents that happened all over the country. ...We'll now connect to your correspondent on the scene. Nonaka-san?"

The image changed and showed an unfamiliar three-way street. In the centre stood a man with a microphone. Behind him stood a couple of patrol cars and a few people were running around.

"Yes, Nonaka here. Right now the police is still investigating the scene. About three weeks had passed since the last incident without anything happening at all, so the incident was thought to stay unsettled, but this recurrence has raised the tension within the police force."

"This came out of nowhere. Headquarters will be a chaos again. Since they're all impatient."

My sister started grumbling with an annoyed tone. But my situation was far from that.

"...Sis, I'm going out for a bit."

"Where to? You only just came home."

"I have to go!"

I stood up full of go and started heading for the entrance hall. I knew where I had to go.

"Now she has done...!"

I was a fool for trusting her. Now that I thought about it, there was no proof for what she said. If she lied in order to keep me in check, then I was truly a fool for not doubting her in the least.

When I put on my shoes irritated, I spotted Bearzawa-kun. Since I was somehow pissed, I punched him. Bearzawa-kun flew through the air and fell on the floor while still maintaining his smile. "Yo, good evening. When the moon is out, I feel like dancing!" Then how about I let you dance to your death!

"Damn!"

This wasn't the time to vent my anger on a stuffed animal. I got ready to leave and was about to spring out.

At that moment.

The chime rang.

"Mh? A visitor?"

My sister came to check. She passed by me and asked through the door.

"Who is there?"

The person on the other said answered in a weak voice.

"U- Umm, I—"

All strength left my body, like when the strings were cut from a marionette. What a good timing. No, actually it was bad timing.

"My name is Kirisaki Kyouko and I'm currently in a relationship with Node-san... Is Node-san at home....?"

My sister looked at me.

Her 'now you have done it' face pissed me off quite a bit.

"Oh my, I'm sorry that I don't have anything prepared. Just take your time! Do you want some juice? Kugito, we still had some snacks, didn't we? Like some chocolate. Aw geez, I'm a bit careless, so I don't know where stuff is in the house. I'm sorry."

My sister said so smiling, when Kirisaki somewhat shyly responded to the hospitality.

"No, not all... I apologize for coming over so suddenly. There was something I wanted to discuss with Node-san...."

Since Kirisaki had said all that with flushed cheeks, my sister was quite excited, put her hands together and shouted.

"So~ cute~!"

She hugged her from behind and rubbed her cheeks against hers. That.... That wasn't my sister.

"How cold of you, Kugito. Why didn't you tell me that you had such a cute girl besides you."

"No, she isn't really my girlfriend or anything."

"You don't need to be embarrassed. Or did you thought I would worry when I knew you had a girlfriend? Oh please, I'm not that overprotective. Rather I'm worried about that drawn back character of yours. Even as a high schooler, you didn't find a single girl and always made a stupid spaced out face like a dog in the summer heat. But you still had it in you after all."

I felt like she insulted me continuously without a care, but whatever. That didn't matter now.

"Like I told you, Sis, she's..."

"Hey, Kirisaki-san, what do you like about Kugito? While he's my little brother, he still doesn't seem to be the type to be popular with the girls."

"Ah, ehm....His gently side...."

“Kyaa! So love-struck!”

Listen to me, even if it’s just for five minutes!

“Sis... Leave us alone and go back to work. You just slipped away, right?”

“Eh? Ah, right. Damn. It just got so interesting.”

My sister sighed when she looked at the clock. Then she faced Kirisaki and told her “Okay, Kirisaki-san, just feel at home here. I mean it. I’ll be home late. So you can try a couple of stuff, you know. How should I call it, the mistakes of youth? Anyway, everything’s allowed! That guy is a virgin, so he probably sucks at it, so you have to do something about it yourself!” with a hand on her shoulder.

“Just get out of here, you pervert.”

“So mean! ... I get it already!”



While puffing up her cheeks, my sister somewhat happy left for the second floor with dance steps. Soon enough she came down wearing a suit and left with a "See you" while waving her hand.

Kirisaki saw her off with a smile and the moment the door closed, she was back to her usual boldness.

"What an interesting sister."

"...Don't speak about my sister right now."

I pressed my hand against my forehead and sighed. "So..." I looked down to Kirisaki, who sat on a chair.

"Let's start by how you knew where I live."

"To make it short and precise, I asked Kuon Rin."

Is that so. Well, I somehow expected that.

"Then, that aside. ...There's another thing I want to ask you."

"I know."

Kirisaki said.

"...It's about what was in the news, right?"

"Yeah. ...You lied to me, didn't you? Have you forgotten already why I put up with your eccentricity? Or did you do it knowingly? Either way, you're the worst."

Breathing out. Kirisaki shook her head and looked up to me.

"It wasn't me."

"Huh?"

"I came here to tell you that."

"...What do you mean?"

I sat down on a chair and looked straight at Kirisaki. She likewise looked straight into my eyes.

"Just what I have said."

She specified.

"The incident reported in the news wasn't done by me."

"What?"

"Everything I told you was the truth. As long as I have you, there's no need for me to become the <Midnight killing Devil>. Therefore I haven't killed a single person since I met you."

"....I hope that's true."

"If you don't believe me, we can't proceed our conversation. If you insist on doubting me, then we're done here."

I crossed my arms and looked Kirisaki into the eyes. She lightly nodded. Sadly I wasn't that experience to tell if was lying just by looking her into the eyes. But at least Kirisaki didn't avert her gaze even by a millimetre.

"...Okay."

I decided to trust her for now.

"Thanks."

Kirisaki gave a small smile.

"So, what's going on."

Kirisaki uttered a "Mhm", then kept quiet for a bit. Then she murmured softly.

"My guess is— Someone is imitating my crime."

"A copycat criminal?"

"Probably. ...Do you have a computer?"

"Nah, we can't afford to buy something that expensive."

Kirisaki nodded in comprehension and stood up.

"Then let's go to my room. I have some clues."

In the room that was as plain as before, Kirisaki served me some tea, opened the lid of her notebook and turned it on.

Meanwhile I idly drank my tea and looked around the room. The last time I was here I hadn't noticed it, but there was a book shelf packed with manga, novels and pocketbooks.

"You like to read?"

"Yeah, specially manga."

"What's your favourite?"

"Doraemon."

I involuntarily spouted my tea. This answer was so different from her character.

"What's up?"

"No... I only had expected something more bloody."

"Can you proudly admit that your favourite book is a porn book? Liking and desire are two different things."

I see. "But still, Doraamon?"

"It's a good manga. It shows you that the future is limitless. It makes living enjoyable."

"Guess you can look at it like that. By the way, which character do you like?"

"Suneo."

"Yet another weird pick."

"Nobita is a coward that clads himself with in good-nature. Shizuka is unrealistic. Gian is disappointing and only becomes a good guy in the movie, which is hypocrisy, so I hate him. Suneo appears the most realistic."

"I like Nobita though. I sympathize with him, since he's aware of his own stupidity and laziness, yet is ready to risk his life."

"A typical answer from you."

Kirisaki said amused and moved the mouse. This might have been the very first time I had such a normal conversation with her.

"Look here."

She turned the notebook so that I could look at it too. We were both peeking at it. The screen showed a black background with white gothic letters that said <Alice Tea Party>.

"What's this?"

"A private website on the internet... A so called homepage."

"Well, I see that much....Alice Tea Party? Is it Alice from Wonderland?"

"Yeah."

She clicked on the enter button below the site's name, when the site asked for a password. Quite the security for a personal website. A membership system, huh.

"To tell the truth, this is an underground site. Average people can't access it."

"Underground?"

"It means under the surface. Only those who cleared a certain condition, will get a mail from the admin with a password."

In no time the top page appeared. The background was still black and in the middle was a teapot, which had a malicious skull mark. How vulgar. Below it was written:

<Congratulations to you, who spent a boring life>

There were little contents. Only a BBS, a chat and an admin contact form.

"What's this site for?"

"It's mainly a site for people, who have a liking for crimes, to talk about their feelings, which they usually can't express."

Geh.

"And there's something particular about these people. It's rumoured that 90% of all the grotesque crimes around world are committed by people who access this site."

"...Isn't that a problem?"

"That what makes it interesting."

Kirisaki clicked accustomed on the BBS. A common tree BBS popped up. While we had no computer at home, I knew at least these technical terms from just now, because we have a computer class at school. That's how it was. I had no idea though who I was explaining myself to.

"On the other hand, they say even the police is on this site, since it's gives a good opportunity to cope with crimes. Well, it's all a rumour at best."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, look here."

Saying that, Kirisaki clicked a random thread title.

There the thread starter, who called herself a housewife in the 30s, was talking about her abnormal liking. Apparently she couldn't climax during sex when she didn't see the blood-shot face of her partner, so she ended up strangling her sex partners to death. Then understanding people suggested that she should only strangle them to the utmost limit without killing them. On a different thread a guy, who had the fetish of changing out his own eyeballs with that of someone else,

was endlessly going on about who had the best eyeballs so far. When I looked at the replies, there was someone suggesting to try out cutting off the own fingers and sew back on the fingers from a woman. Furthermore, there was a guy, who considered a bag made of human skin cooler and manlier than any brand one, since it was easier to use, speaking with someone, who was doing the same, and considering if they should meet up and exchange their stuff.

"....I feel sick just by reading this."

I massaged my temples and averted my eyes from the screen. It really wasn't something to look at steadfast.

"Wouldn't get such a site get taken down immediately? Announcing crimes on the internet is a hot topic these days, isn't it?"

"First off, the admin of the site never shows his face. Second, a direct access to the site is nearly impossible. <Alice Tea Party> doesn't use a provider, but is set up on a private server. It's hard to determine it's owner."

"But what if someone of the participants goes to report it to the police?"

"Happened already a few times. It was even once shut down by the warning of the police. But not long after it was rebooted on a new server. It's a vicious circle. Besides."

"Beside?"

"As I told you earlier, there's a rumour that the police takes no decisive steps, since it's a good opportunity to cope with the crimes instead."

"Yeah. ...Though to me it only looks like the site is promoting crimes."

"That's were you're wrong. Gakuto, do you know the absolute flaw of the convenient tool called the internet?"

"...That you can't see the other party's face?"

"A clichéd answer, but yes. No matter how much one makes himself a good person on the internet, as long as you don't deal with him personally, it will always stay an illusion created by words. There's a good chance that the guy, who boast that he got a new girl every day, graduated from Toudai and is a qualified lawyers, is actually a 30 years old fat otaku NEET that didn't leave his house for 10 years."

"Right."

"Why do you think people create fake identities on the internet?"

"Well, because it's feels better. Rather than admitting to one's own boring self, it's more fun to spent time by pretending to be someone really great. After all, you won't get into a close relationship with those you meet on the internet anyway."

"Yeah. And the feeling of liberation by putting on a mask lets people be more forthright. On the internet, a docile person nonchalant insults someone else or merciless flames, discounting his own weak self that stands in contrast to the fictional work of movies, manga or novels. That all comes from the release of the drive that was being restrained within us. <I'm not like that>, <I'm better than this>, <That guy gets acknowledged while I'm being excoriated. That's not right.>. We usually can't easily voice such thoughts. But on the internet, where we are all isolated and separated from each other, we can voice them out freely. One can show his true nature or act out a personality as much as he wants."

"So what?"

"These two might appear different, but they share a common basis."

"Just tell me your conclusion already."

"Don't rush me. I meant that either of them relieves you from your daily stress, discontent and grumbling. The joy of having others believe your fake personality and the pleasure of being able to release plenty of one's self, which can't be shown to others. Most of the people feel better with that and return to the reality that only restrains themselves. Well, though sometimes there are people who ignore that and just devote themselves to their internet self."

Anyway, try to imagine what would happen to these people if they hadn't had the internet."

"...Well, not everyone, but surely some of them would overload on the stress and snap."

"Exactly."

Kirisaki looked at me with a face that said 'Now you understand'. As opposed as I was, I had no choice but to admit to that.

In short it was like this: These abnormal and perverse crimes that were described on the board, weren't necessarily all conducted in real life. There was a possibility that people, who wanted to do these actions, but couldn't accomplish them in the end, just acted out their <self who did that> on this site and thus gained a temporary satisfaction. Before they knew it, these people would be in a world where they <accomplished their actions without actually doing them> and their desire to accomplish the crimes in real life would disappear. Certainly, in that way <Alice Tea Party> might cope with crimes.

"There you have it. But it's just a floating rumour, so nothing certain."

"...I understand. So, you're a regular on this site?"

"I wrote a couple of times on the board. I tried to make a list of my crimes."

"Why would you do that."

".....I had hoped the drive inside me would be satisfied with that. But it was no use. It seems my drive can't be answered by this fake kind of satisfaction."

Well, if desire could be answered by the mere thought of "I had sex", then mankind would have gone extinct long ago.

"Still, the contents of this site were quite interesting, so I checked them on a daily basis. That's when I found a slightly disturbing post."

Kirisaki typed <March Hare> into the board's search function and pushed the enter-key.

"By the way, why is the site called <Alice Tea Party>? I only saw the anime of Alive in Wonderland, but it was far from the grotesque stuff here."

"In Lewis Carroll's <Alice in Wonderland>, the heroine Alice attends a strange tea party held by strange characters by chance."

A lot of results appeared on the screen. Kirisaki clicked the scroll bar and scrolled down.

Then she stopped at a certain result and clicked the button to show the entire thread.

"Carroll calls it a <Mad Tea Party>."

...I see. That certainly fit this site.

"Now there is someone with the nickname <March Hare>, which is a character of that tea party."

The thread title was <Midnight killing Devil>.

The contents were about the recent serial killer that left behind a cross-shaped wound. The abnormality of repeating the crimes all over the country and the merciless way of killing received high valuation. It worried me how Kirisaki was called a <god> frequently.

A confident post from someone that seemed to have an acquaintance with the police. stated that the crime was committed precisely at midnight.

"Is that true?"

I asked the criminal herself. Kirisaki slightly shook her head.

"It's not. Certainly, I killed during the night to avoid detection, but it wasn't precisely at midnight. Besides, it was a complete different time when I killed you too, wasn't it."

Now that she mentioned it. Back then, I thought it was strange.

"I guess this thread got leaked somewhere, which resulted in that nickname. I had no intention at all to grace myself with it. There's obviously no need to commit a murder at midnight when there's no merit to it."

"But the thread stated <Our god embeds a high grade of art in the crime. The cross-shaped wound and the midnight time are for that very reason.>"

"Kugito, only characters of a manga or some bad kid with no brains would embed art into a murder. I never believed that my actions were the least bit magnificent. Well, in any case a crime should be nasty. Don't you agree?"

Of course I had no intention to agree to that. But

"Then why did you inflict a cross-shaped wound?"

"Just a habit."

....Is that so. She, who gave off an aura of "The cross-shape wound represents Jesus's crucifixion itself. It's proof of lamenting over the fact that I myself are an existence that's capable of probing the filthy humans and that the crimes are god's iron hammer.", suddenly looked pitiful to me.

Scrolling further down, there was another reply by <March Hare>. Guess he must have hit the word limit, as it seemed to continue from where the previous post left off.

This time though he was talking about his discontent about the <Midnight killing Demon>. He pointed out the flaws, like the wild way of killing, the naivety in disposing the corpse or the use of a specific weapon. He ended his post with the words "I could do a better job". Previous to that, not many replies had <Midnight killing Devil> in it, so the sudden rise in Kirisaki's popularity was eye-catching. Kirisaki must have felt the same as she looked into my eyes and nodded lightly.

"Giving information only you know to show off that you understand the person the best and when everyone's attention is caught and they start praising, you switch over to the opposition. A typical example of a critic with a strong need for admiration. It's not just the <March Hare>, there are a lot of people like that on the internet."

"How selfish. I guess if you take guys like that serious, they'll only get more arrogant."

"Well, to begin with it wasn't done to get people to complain. I ignored him at first too. But."

She clicked on the next page. Again March Hare's name was there. He wrote the following:

"Lately, the crimes of our God, the <Midnight killing Devil>, are too artless. The initial beauty and philosophy are gone."

Thinking that he was about the only one, who wanted to see some art or philosophy in the crimes, I read on how March Hare continued.

"Our God might be dead. As sad as it is, we no longer can do anything about it. But, we cannot let our God's glorious deeds go to waste. We need someone to succeed our God."

What...? How inappropriate.

Guess I wasn't the only one to think that, as there followed replies asking about the meaning of March Hare's word. That prolonged the thread abnormally, before he answered again.

"Of course people would be curious about my words. It's only the beginning now. Look forward to it. Over."

"Not that I really care, but he sounded quite arrogant. I thought one needed to be even more mannered on the internet than in real life."

"He's the type that thinks that arrogance proves his own high standing. Don't take it to mind. When I read this thread, I tried sending him a mail. I was curious to what he was up to."

"But there was no reply?"

"You're quick on the uptake."

"Guess that's the 'something on your mind' that you mentioned on the rooftop. Even I have some brain cells I can use. I figured it out mostly. You didn't get a reply to your mail. Then there were no more replies to this post. You had no more clues, so you gave up. But then."

"Yeah."

Kirisaki nodded on my words.

"After that I saw the news reporting a crime of the <cross-slashing Devil>, which I had no memory of."

"...How many of these hot-topic crimes were your doing?"

"A third—Or maybe even less. Even I can't make it as far as Akita or Kyushu."

"That means, the crimes there were done by March Hare—"

"—in my stead. Yes, that's a possibility."

Kirisaki sighed.

"...I have no proof if he has done it, so I didn't say anything. And it strangely calmed down lately. But now it came back."

"...I see. So, what are you going to about it?"

"About what?"

Kirisaki made a perplexed expression. I pointed to the screen while saying with a accusing tone.

"Your killing spree is what caused such a nutcase to appear. How are you going to take responsibility for it."

"Even if you ask that."

Kirisaki put her elbow on the desk and rested her cheek on it and she waved her other free hand fluttering besides her head.

"Assuming that we're going to punish him somehow, just what do you expect me to do when I don't know his name, address or even face?"

Well, she had a point..

"So we can't do anything even though we know what a dangerous nutcase he is, huh."

"The dilemma of the internet."

"Is our only choice is to leave him be...?"

"Going by the facts, yes....But, people are murdered by a guy that pretends to be me. Simply sitting idle and watching that isn't my style."

"But there's nothing we can do, is there?"

"Guess so... I would like to compile the information and any witness's report on this site to get some kind of solution, but I don't know how effective that will be."

Kirisaki puckered her lips displeased. Guess she didn't like how we currently weren't even on the tail of the criminal that was mimicking her. Despite being a serial killer, Kirisaki was just a simple female high school student. When she didn't have an investigation power like the police, there was no way she had any original connections.

"...Is there nothing I can do?"

Kirisaki looked my way with her almond eyes.

"That's a surprising statement from you. Usually you only care for yourself."

"What do you take me for? Even I have an average sense of justice."

"...That's really hard to believe."

What a coincidence. For me too.

"....Well, jokes asides. Just telling you to give your best and going home wouldn't suit well with me."

"I see. Now that half-assed attitude is more like you."

Was she making fun of me?

Kirisaki said while closing the site.

"Then there's one thing I would like you to do."

"What is it?"

"Forget it."

She turned off the notebook.

"Forget all about it and go back to your normal life. Me aside, this doesn't concern you at all. I doubt the copy-cat killer will come as far as to this city."

"...But."

"What? Do you have some decisive hint for identifying the culprit?"

"No, no such thing."

"I know it's a mean to say this, but then there is nothing you can do. At any rate, this is my own problem."

I kept quiet. While I was opposed to it, Kirisaki was certainly right. There was nothing I could do. I hated my own incapability a bit.

However—there was something bothering me.

"... May I speak?"

"What is it?"

"Well, who do you think was it that throughout smashed that so called "normal life" with a hammer to oblivion?"

"Fate...Yeah, an existence above the clouds..."

"It was you!"

"How rude. All I did was stabbing you!"

"To hell with you 'all I did'! In which world would you find a crazy guy that answers 'Geez, you're so helpless. It's no big deal, so I'll forgive you.'?"

"...."

"Point the finger at yourself before you point it at me."

"You mean, in the end I'm the only one to forgive myself? I see, I get it. I'll forgive myself! Okay, Kugito, today it'll be the innards. Stick out your stomach."

I slapped her without mercy on the cheek.

"Ow! Domestic Violence!"

From who! Actually, it means something else!

"....Somehow I'm tired. I'm going home."

I stood up while pressing my temples.

"Yeah, that's good. That's better for your psyche rather than to waste time by bemoaning your futility."

"You..."

Could it be she was considerate towards—

"...can't be. So stupid. I'm going home."

"It saddens me that you weren't struck in surprise there."

"Maybe not by surprise, but I'm sure you'll strike me."

I brought the stupid conversation to an end and went on my way home.

My head was filled with the peaceful thought of how I'm going to explain the situation with Kirisaki to my sister.

Now that I thought about it, Kirisaki's words made perfect sense.

The copy-cat killer that repeats crimes as a fake <Midnight killing Devil>. He's not an existence to be ignored, but there's nothing I can do about it. Sure, I'm immortal and better at fighting than the average guy, but that's all. Not only didn't I have the strength to pull off the stunt of catching the criminal that's roils Japan, I didn't even have the brains for it. Like always, I noticed how useless I am.

Well, whatever. Like Kirisaki said, that all didn't concern me. The possibility that

the country-wide operating criminal will show up in this small city by chance is zero. I'll follow her order and forget about it. Japan police, give it your all in catching this nutcase. I'll hold down the other one.

The sun was already going down. The people and buildings were coloured red. While holding in a yawn, I was walking sloppy towards my house. When.

"Huh, Kugi-chan."

I heard a familiar voice and turned around. Kuon Rin in her uniform was waving her hand.

"Yo. On your way home? Quite late."

"Yeah. I was cleaning the square and later was asked by the teacher to do a couple of things, so before I noticed, it got so late."

Rin draw closer with small steps and slapped my back.

"You're out quite late too, Kugi-chan."

"I'm a delinquent, so this is just perfect."

"Even a delinquent might go straight home after school."

"What's the point of being a delinquent then?"

Also, didn't she just consent to me being a delinquent?

"Then you're a honour student, Kugi-chan?"

"If I'm a honour student, then what are you? A goddess?"

"Worship me!"

I ruffled her head.

"Gya! My hair! What chat for!"

"Sorry. That's how our religion worships our gods."

I lightly laughed when Rin angrily puffed her cheeks.

"Hey, want to walk together?"

"No need to specially ask that. Aren't we walking together already?"

"Ah, right."

"But you sure are a rare kind."

When I scratched my head and said that, Rin looked perplexed.

"Why?"

"Well, I always wanted to tell you. Nothing good will happen to you if you stick together with a guy like me. Quite the contrary, lately a rumour is going around saying you're my underling. Did you know?"

"No way."

"Yes way."

"Your underling, huh...Then I need to add 'yo man' at the end of every sentence."

What age did she live in?

"Well, it's fine. After all I'm doing as I please."

"Well, yeah..."

I walked besides Rin on the dusk-coloured road.

I had nothing special to talk about, so I kept quiet, but when Rin asked me something, I answered back accordingly.

I thought about what Kirisaki would say if she saw us like this, then wondered why I would even think of her now. That monologue pained me.

"...What's wrong?"

"Nah, nothing. I was only pondering who it was that said that a random coincidence was an inevitability."

And that I would like to smack that person while denying these words. I wouldn't accept that this outcome was predestined. It was all due to my bad luck.

"? I don't really get it. You say some difficult stuff, Kugi-chan."

"Yeah. You on the other hand only say some easy stuff. I want to learn from you."

"...Was that a bit of sarcasm?"

That she noticed it was impressive alone.

But when I thought about it, Rin really did only talk about average stuff. About what she watched on TV yesterday, about the delicious cake she ate recently, about the interesting new game, about a touching movie, etc, etc.

That's the common sense I want to teach the witch that endless goes on about the sensation of cutting through flesh and it's accompanying emotion or the difference in the absolute charm between flowing blood and paint.

"That's what a young female high school girl is about. But it's not like you're doing good deeds all day, right."

"Well, of course. I'm a girl after all. I'm interested in fashion like any other, I want to keep a cute pet and..."

"And?"

"...even fell in love."

"Hee. That's a first. I'm curious what your type of man is."

"I won't tell you. I gave up anyway."

"Why?"

"There was no hope for me."

"That's not like you. You're always so annoying energetic around me."

"....Idiot."

She called me an idiot. I wasn't sure how I should take this out of context insult. I guess I should get angry for now?

"Hmpf, just go ahead."

What was she getting angry for.

Rin puckered her lips, went ahead and suddenly said "Ah".

"What's up."

Before us was a crosswalk and a child was waiting alone at the traffic light. I wondered where her mother was, when I spotted her on the other side of the street waving her hand. The child must have not been able to keep up with the mother.

"Excuse me for second."

Rin approached the child with small steps and said something. The child was hesitating a bit, but when Rin smiled and put out her hand, it shyly grabbed it.

In time, the traffic light changed to green and Rin crossed the crosswalk together with the kid. I followed behind them.

Rin matched her steps completely to the child's one. A feat impossible to me. It was a drowsy slow pace, but for some reason I didn't find it annoying.

When we arrived on the other said, the mother thanked her, but Rin only answer "No problem". Then she squatted, patted the child on the head and said "See you".

The child nodded and said "Bye, bye" while waving it's hand, then left together with it's mother.

"Okay, let us get going too."

Rin didn't boast about her natural conducted good deed, made a face like she only did what she had to do and faced towards me.

I looked down a bit. Then we resumed our walk together.

"Hey."

I called from behind Rin.

"What?"

"...Why are you like that?"

"Mh?"

Rin turned around without stopping.

"Like what?"

"Well, like..."

I scratched my head.

"How should I say. Doing things that don't get you anything every day. It's not like you gain anything by it. I couldn't do that."

"It's not like I'm doing it because I want something in return."

That I knew.

"Mhm. What can I say."

Rin faced forwards and looked up to the sky.

"When I leave troubled people alone, my chest gets this funny restless feeling. Like it's saying that I didn't do anything, even though there was supposed to be something I could have done. And there is no guarantee that someone is going to do something about that restless feeling of mine later on. So I think it's better to make a move, so that I don't get that feeling to begin with."

....I see.

"....Besides, you can do it too, Kugi-chan."

"Me? What?"

"You're pretty considerate to me in various ways. Even today."

"No, well..."

But that was only because it was you. I wouldn't care for anyone that I don't know.

"It doesn't change the fact that you helped me. Everyone's like that. They want to help their important person. Want to do something for it. Isn't that so?"

"Well, yeah...."

"I don't mean to brag, but I have a lot of that <important person>."

Rin said with a smile.

"That's all to it, I think."

"....You're amazing."

There's too much of a difference between us. Don't tell me you also seriously wish for world peace?

"I do, something wrong with that?"

"No, nothing wrong with that."

I shook my head.

"So you don't think that you're getting the short end of the stick? There aren't that many who repay kindness with kindness. Like these girls today."

"That's not true. Though things like today do happen sometimes.... When I do the greening campaign on Sunday or when I help out at the nursing home, I'm often told 'Thank you'. Don't you think that's a precious gain? I mean, it doesn't happen all so often that you get thanked every day.

But whenever you're kind to someone, the occurrence increases by one. So I don't think I'm getting the short end of the stick at all."

What to say, you're second to none.

"You're even kind to a worthless guy like me."

"You're not worthless!"

She replied with a rather serious tone to my casually said words. I stopped unintentional.

"...I tell you I am."

There wasn't anyone as worthless as me.

"That's not true. Everyone is needed by someone, just by being alive."

Thanks. But you can only say that since you're happy.

"Then, why aren't you allowed to be happy, Kugi-chan?"

Because the condition doesn't apply to me. Since it's not certain if I'm <alive>.

"....I don't get what you're saying."

Rin crossed her arms and tilted her head lost in thought.

"But that's not good at all."

"What is?"

"To presume by yourself that you're unwanted. That's rude to the people who think that you're needed."

"There isn't anyone like that."

"There is."

"Is not."

"IS!"

You're quite persistent on that.

"You don't get it, Kugi-chan.... Don't you remember it?"

"What?"

"You saved me during the freshman year when I was bullied by the boys."

....Doesn't ring a bell.

"For you it might have been something trivial, but for me it was something to be really thankful of....Since I was small, I tried to be kind, but was hated instead and bullied a lot. At these times I thought I should just stop being kind. But then you saved me and when I told you the reason for the bullying you simply said:"

Rin looked me into the face and said.

"You're an idiot."

I was such an ass.

"...But you also said that I'm great and respect worthy. I was really happy. It was

the first time someone acknowledged the things I had done.”

That I didn’t remember that made me even more of an ass. I should at least remember what I said myself!

“As you see, you can’t decided by yourself what others think of you.”

Rin draw closer and grabbed my hand.

“So, never think that you’re worthless.”

I didn’t answer. Rin said.

“I’m sure even Kirisaki would find it sad.”

“...I wonder.”

“Besides, I also think it’s sad.”

Rin turned around and started to walk.

“Makes it look like it even denies my feelings of I...”

I couldn’t hear what you said well. Say it once more.

“....Hmpf. See you!”

Rin walked away without looking back.

“Ugh!

Immediately after she tripped. Ohh, her panties were in plain view. White-blue striped panties. Nice. Wait, it wasn’t the time for that.

“...Are you okay?”

I was going to give her a hand, but Rin stood up by herself while saying “I... I’m okay”.

“Th- Then, see you!”

Then somewhat hurried, she once again walked away.

“...What an oddball.”

I pondered while I watched Rin’s back with a wry smile.

—Then, why aren’t you allowed to be happy, Kugi-chan?

One has to shoulder an equivalent risk when straying from the path.

I recalled Kirisaki's words.

Happiness.

I'm sure the risk I'm shouldering in order to live is that I don't have it.

Chapter 04: Immortal Boy and the prelude of Despair

The sky was covered in clouds.

The oppressive dark of the grey sky seemed to curse <his> action.

But <he> wasn't so weak as to give up with just that.

It was a small town. Technically it was in the Kanto region, but it couldn't be called a big city at all. It was a perfect provincial town, so <he> wondered if their <god> was really here.

But there were no other choices. The only one <he> could rely on now was <God's child>. Opening the cell phone, <he> looked at the mail that <he> already read a couple of times. There had been a couple of mails from <God's child>. The mail originator contacted <him> when he read <his> post on the bulletin board. <God's child> expressed an approval to <his> thoughts and pledged to support <him> on all fronts. Thanks to that, <he> got a lot of detailed data on their <god>.

Now all that was left was how to deal with is.

<He> had an idea. God was dead. But no one, <him> included, wished for that. But the creator was gone while leaving showing an obvious weakness. <He> was disappointed and in despair. The saviour, who had finally appeared before <him>, had miserably fallen to the earth.

<God> had to be punished.

By <him>, who would become a new <god>.

<He> walked on the street. <He> had a few candidates. <He> also knew where they lived. But the problem was whom to choose. Starting with someone, who had wide connections, was a bit of a problem.

At large this was a shopping street. There was a game-center, a bookstore, a toy shop and a big shopping mall. Also, a lot of people. Loud laughing and shrill talking. So noisy. So annoying. So disgusting.

They were all plebs. Not feeling anything, not thinking anything, not doing anything, just entrusting their bodies to the never-ending daily life. They didn't know the real pleasure of this world and just spent their lives practically.

Aww, so displeasing. Quite so.

Whom to choose. Whom to kill. Whom to settle on.

<He> randomly wandered around when he was talked to.

"Hey, you."

<He> stopped and turned around. There stood a woman in jeans and a jacket over her shirt. Her black hair was tied at the back.

"Where are you going now? You're in casual clothes, but what about school?"

"..."

"I wish you would answer me. This is kinda my job, so I'll be in trouble if you don't answer. Are you a student from Meitou Academy? Today is it's founddation day, isn't it?"

Who was she? Who was she? Who was she? Who was she? Who was she? Who was she? Who was she? Who was she? Who was she? Who was she? Who was she?

"....Doesn't concern you."

"Well, normally you would be right. But you know"

The woman put her hand into her pocket and pulled something out that looked like a card case. She opened it and hold it out vertically. It showed the woman's picture and her name. And beneath that was a police sign.

"I work at the juvenile crime section at the Meitou Police Station. So I have to hear out boys like you, who don't like being tied down. I might even have to contact your parents."

"I... haven't really done anything."

"I hope so. But I have regulations, so could you answer me?"

"...It is the foundation day."

"Really?"

The woman raised an eyebrow. "Then why didn't you answer me immediately?"

<He> averted his gaze. The woman said.

"...Sorry, but can you come with me for a bit?"

"Nope."

"Don't say that. Katsudon is out of the question, but I can treat you to some tea."

The woman grabbed <his> arm. She was smiling, but exerting quite the strength.

"...Let me go."

"Mhm, I can't really do that."

<He> tried to shake her hand off. But the woman didn't let go and forcefully dragged him along.

"Let me..."

"Really, it's only for a bit. Stop resisting or it will just become too bothersome."

"Shut up—"

<He> reached into <his> pocket to confirm that the weapon was there. Then <he> shouted.

"Shut the fuck up!"

<He> pulled away his arm and at the same time cut her arm. The woman let out a small scream and let go off <him>. On that chance, <he> ran away.

"Ah, hey—Geez, if you had followed me obediently, you would have been free in a couple of hours! Wait up!"

<He> paid the woman, who came chasing after <him>, no mind and ran into a crowd of people.

Pissed off. Annoyed. Irritating. Noisy. Disgusting. Anger.

Ten minutes had passed. It seemed that <he> got away, so <he> caught his breath and looked around. But the woman wasn't seen anywhere.

<He> hated her type of person. It didn't concern anyone where and what <he> was doing. <He> had a convex mission. For that reason <he> was walking around all of Japan. What was wrong with that? So what about school? What point was it to go to a place, where they crammed useless information into your head? So what about parents? They only existed to pay for your living. Both were an annoyance. Meaningless for <him>, who would become a god.

Aw, so disgusting. An irritation <he> could not suppress. At this point, anyone would do. <He> would kill the first to catch <his> eye—

"...Here, Granny, your luggage."

Suddenly <he> heard a voice and turned around.

Before <he> had noticed, <he> had reached a main street. A woman, who just seemed to have crossed the cross-walk, handed vinyl-bag filled with ingredients to an older woman besides her.

"Thank you for going out of your way and helping me."

"No problem. There's no traffic light, even though so many cars pass by here. So it can be quite the trouble to cross over. I'm used to it though."

The woman waved her hand with a smile and asked the elder woman "Be careful. Or should I escort you to your home?"

"I'm fine. But what about you? Weren't you on your way somewhere?"

"Mhm, yeah, I'm completely late."

The woman gave a wry smile, whereupon the elder woman raised her eyebrows and said "Oh my, I'm sorry for that."

"Don't worry about it. I'm sure it will work out when I apologize. Anyway, I'm glad you made it over all safely, Granny."

Then the woman raised her hand with a "Okay, see you, Granny". The elder woman nodded, said back a "Thank you so much", took her luggage and left. The woman watched her for a while, then she said "Okay!" with a satisfied look, readied the bag hanging on her shoulder and looked at her wrist watch. "Ah" She let out a voice.

"Already this late.... I have to hurry."

Then she left the main street in a hurry and entered a shabby, empty alley. Most likely she wanted to take a shortcut. <He> opened his eyes. And <he> thought: Ah, this is it. This is—fate. A lucky chance granted to the human, who's meant to become <god>.

<He> opened his cell phone and confirmed it. There was no doubt. It was her.

A wicked smile formed on <his> face. It seemed <he> would achieve <his> goal sooner than expected.

She will do—

She had been <his> favourite ever since <he> had gotten the information. She was a clever woman, who deceived others by making herself to look like a good person. Yeah, her. She would be it.

<He> started to move. <He> hastened his pace. The woman didn't notice. How dumb she was. There was no merit in letting her live.

<He> reached into his pocket. <His> beloved knife was there. <He> took it out, unsheathed it and bared the blade. Soon <he> fell into a trot.

The distance to the woman closed. <He> draw closer and closer. Still, the woman didn't turn around.

And then, <he>—

About one hour had passed.

“These two are late.”

I stood at the fountain in front of the station and spoke to myself while checking the time on my cell phone.

Unfortunately I had nothing on me to kill time, so I could only pointlessly watch the scenery before me. For a weekday it was awfully crowded. Within that, there were some clearly the same age as me. My school had the foundation day today, so I was excused, but I wonder if these guys were actually ever going to school. Such pointless thoughts crossed my mind.

How did all of this start? Right, when I was talking with Kirisaki and Rin, I said “There’s a book I want to buy” without any special meaning. Upon that Rin raised her hand and said “I also want to buy a CD”. Likewise Kirisaki declared “I have something in mind that I would like to buy”. I forgot who suggested it, but it was decided that we go out shopping together on the next Thursday, meeting at 1pm at the fountain. Rin had tried to decline with some stupid reason of “I wouldn’t want to impose on you two”, but I didn’t mind, so I somewhat forcefully made her come. To be honest, it was somewhat dangerous to spend the afternoon all alone with Kirisaki.

But they were late. Did I mistake the meeting time?

I tilted my head, when I heard a bright voice.

“Kugito.”

I turned around. Kirisaki Kyouko was running with a bright smile while waving her hand.

“Ku-gi-to~”

With a blinding smile, Kirisaki draw closer. That scene was just so fitting for a TV drama that I somehow felt that time ran slower. I returned a faint smile and spread my arms as to welcome her.

“Hah!”

When she leaned forward, I jumped backwards right before her arms. Kirisaki’s arms, which were about to embrace me, cut through the air.

“...What are you doing?”

“Because you’re always plotting something when you act like a normal girl.”

“Hahah. Don’t be stupid. Now, where’s my welcome hug?”

Step by step Kirisaki draw closer. I took my distance and kept away.

"Be honest. What's your intention?"

"Nothing. What are you so angry about?"

"About all your actions."

Kirisaki and me faced off while going in a circle in the middle of the street as if we were fighting a death match. Why did I have to endure such suspense on my holiday and even in such a crowded place?

"Fufu. You're such a coward, Kugito."

"Say what you want, but I'll prioritize my own well-being."

Kirisaki looked at me like a beast looks at his prey. Any time now, she'll come...! Thinking that, I pointed behind her and shouted.

"AH! A time hole opened!"

"WHAT!? The day has finally come!?"

Would anyone really turn around on that? Well, whatever. Take this! I launched at Kirisaki's back. I ignored her "Ah!", grabbed her shoulders and twisted her arms. It was a joint lock.

"Ouch! It hurts, Kugito!"

"Give up! What were you trying to do?"

The people around us made a ruckus. Now that I thought about it, a boy holding a young girl in a submission move wasn't such a favorable scene.

"...Uhn, okay. I'll tell you, so let go. I like causing pain, but I'm no fan of the opposite."

What an unseemly comment. I released Kirisaki and walked away from the eyes of the people around us. "C'mon, let's go." I grabbed her hand, when Kirisaki pouted while revealing the big knife that she had hidden behind her back. I took it away from her.

"I hope you aren't wearing another knife at your legs."

"The one you're holding right now is the one I usually have on my thighs."

"Good. I'll keep this."

"...Kugito, you meanie."

I could say the same. Damn, causing me all this unnecessary trouble.

We went back to where we came from.

"....Reminds me, is Kuon Rin here yet?"

"Nah, not yet. Well, her running late isn't unusual, so don't worry."

"Is that so?"

"Yeah. Because she always end up helping people on the way to the meeting spot. She was once left behind on a school trip because of it."

"Wow...Well, that's just like her."

Yeah. But what should we do? Whenever I tried to call her on her cell phone, I only got the answering machine.

"Do we wait for a bit longer?"

"Yeah. By the way, Kugito, don't you have anything to say when you look at me?"

"Anything? Like what? There isn't really anything different about you. If I had to say anything, I would say it's my first time seeing you in casual clothes."

"You noticed it, but don't know what to do. You're beyond help..."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing really.....There."

Pierce. GYAA.

"Don't stab me!"

"Hmpf."

Or rather, she actually had another one! Kirisaki, who had pulled out a knife from her sleeves, laughed.

"Women are full of secrets."

Don't put your weird fetishes together with the general public.

"Geez.... Well, she's still not here? It's quite rare for her to be this late."

I tilted my head. For a while, without saying anything , I spent time looking at the clock and the scenery before me.

Then Kirisaki suddenly shouted "Kugito!"

"What?"

"No, well...you know."

She was stuttering on a rare occasion, so I turned my gaze from the crowd to her.

Kirisaki was unusually looking down with her hands together behind her back. Her feet coming out of the one-piece were knocking on the concrete. Speaking of, she was actually wearing a one-piece. I thought she would wear something more boyish. Well, that aside.

"What's with you, it's creepy."

"No.... Well, if you don't want to, just say so."

"Don't want to."

"....You turn me down before I even ask?"

"Can't be any decent anyway."

"Th- That's not true."

Kirisaki said a bit flustered. Now that made even me bewildered. I tried to get a better look at her face and said "Okay, then go on". Upon that Kirisaki looked up a bit.

"Just for a bit will do."

"...Ah. Geez, that again? You can't endure it any longer?"

Was that the reason her face was so red for a while now? What a troublesome fellow. I don't like being attacked out of nowhere like before, but it was different when she asked me beforehand. Well, at times where she really couldn't endure it any more, I'll forgive it. That was our promise to begin with.

"That said, this place isn't any good... So let's better change the location."

"That's not it."

Kirisaki grabbed on my hand when I was about to leave. I turned around and made a perplexed expression.

"You're being weird."

"Well—"

Kirisaki said with a faint voice as she was about to faint.

"—of us go around?"

"Huh? What?"

"I said"

She raised her head completely and opened her mouth to the fullest.

"Why don't just the two of us go around?"

"...Just you and me? What about Rin?"

"J- Just for a bit. It shouldn't matter. She'll surely call us if something is up."

Well, she had a point.

"Why just us two? You don't want Rin to find out about the thing you buy?"

"Ah, yeah, that too. I want you to tag along for a bit."

"I don't really mind."

I scratched my neck. "You're kind weird today. Why didn't you say so from the beginning?"

"Wh- What's the problem, really. Even I am like that sometimes."

"I don't think that's an answer to my question."

"Shut up! It's decided now, so let's go, Kugito!"

"Sure."

I replied easygoing, when Kirisaki grabbed my hand and started to pull me along with a "This way".

I opened my cell phone, confirmed that there were no mails or calls from Rin and closed it again.

.....Did something happen to her?

I wasn't quite sure myself, but usually when a girl drags off a guy for shopping it's to a clothing shop or an ice cream parlor. If not that, then a book or CD store. And at times, when she has such a hobby, it would be an anime goods store.

But the store Kirisaki dragged me to, was a small store that you entered through a back alley. It hadn't had any signs, but there were a lot of people despite that.

"...What's this place?"

In front of the store was a glass case that displayed knives and airguns.

"It's an army shop. It's quite famous amongst those who know it. Some really good stuff is sold here."

"....Oh really."

"Give me a minute."

Saying that, Kirisaki entered the store. I stood there bored. She was truly a weird girl.

When I looked around, I noticed that the alley in stood in was full of stores that sold stuff like this one. To think our city had such a maniac zone, I only got to know about it after 17 years of life. Amazing that Kirisaki found this, even though she only just transferred over here. You couldn't underestimate a maniac's sense of smell.

After a while, Kirisaki came out. She made a slightly disappointed expression, so they probably hadn't had the thing she wanted. She said "Let's look around a bit more", so I followed.

"What are you looking for?"

"The knife I'm using right now is pretty old and reaching it's end soon. It's getting jagged and rusty. So I want to get a new one. I had my eyes on a few ones, but none that met all my requirements. The one I wanted was sold out."

"I see. Though from my point of view, the knives all look the same."

"That's not true, Kugito. Not only are the shapes and acidity quite different, but also the grip and used steel. Especially for me it's a matter of life or death."

"I believe it's rather a matter of life or death for me."

"Don't take it to heart. To begin with, knives have endless different ways of usage, unlike guns. Depending on the skills of the user it can be the best or worse weapon. For example the English military..."

It followed this and that. I couldn't care less about this maniac talk. So I just randomly nodded with "Yeah" and "Yup".

"Do you understand what that means?"

"Yeah."

"WHAT!? You get it!? You're amazing, Kugito. Even some experts have trouble understanding this theory."

Eh, really? Wow, I'm good.

"...You weren't listening, were you."

"Haha, what are you saying."

Kirisaki said "Forget it" and pouted. It was rather troubling to me when she was pouting.

"...In the end that's all I can talk about. I'm a boring girl."

"Self-awareness is one step in the right direction. But it must be hard for you. The stuff about knives aside, you can't even talk to others about your tendency."

"Yeah, but I'm used to it."

Well, good then.

"Though to be honest... I just might have forced myself to get used to it."

"Huh?"

"No—Ah!"

Kirisaki suddenly raised her voice. Then she started running towards a store. Huh, what? When I followed, Kirisaki was glued to a glass case, watching at a knife.

"That's unsightly, so stop it."

"I have only seen it in a magazine so far. Amazing. It's a Randall knife..."

"A what?"

"A Randall knife. It's a knife made by an American. It's a fantastic work with high quality. ...I only have my part-time money, so it's way out of my reach."

"Hmm."

"Look at this brilliance. And the handworked shape. Simple, yet profound. Randall's work aren't just superior due to their shape, but also for the manifold ways of practical usage. Ahh, I wonder how pleasant it would feel if I were to cut through flesh with it..."

And the one being cut will be me.

"Is that knife that great?"

"It's not simple 'great'."

Kirisaki turned around to me and started blabbering.

"You see, when Randall started making knives, he was basically an unknown! But! It all started when the second president wanted to make non-profitable, high quality knives! In a short time of period the company gained a reputation at a surprising speed and became first rate! When you hear of Randall knives, it all started from the legend how Minnark Forwald, a famous American soldier,

survived the world war with just a Randall knife after he lost his gun. (‘%#”# (‘%\$#”! &) %#”!”&) %”(\$””! (Didn’t listen anymore.)”

Sc- Scary—! Maniacs are scary—-!

“O- Okay, I get it.”

“Oh yeah? I can still go on.”

Looking somewhat unsatisfied, Kirisaki uttered a “But the real thing sure is different...” and stuck to the glass case again. She looked like a boy admiring a trumpet. Different from usual, she appeared somewhat like a girl. That appearance of hers was one of the very few human expressions she had.

“....You want it that bad?”

“Yeah, I always dreamt of owning one.”

“I see.”

I gave a light sigh and reached into my pocket. I took out my wallet. A couple of banknotes were smiling at me, since I put in a few more out of the living expenses for some books. Not really because of that, but I pondered for a bit. But I shook my head right after. If you’re hesitant, it’s better not to even consider alternatives to begin with.

“Kirisaki.”

Kirisaki turned around on my word.

“I’ll buy it for you.”

“Eh?”

“The knife. You want it, right?”

“....Are you sure?”

“I’m left with quite the sum of money as the technical head of the family. I got a bit to spare.”

“Well, but....”

She said, but fixed her gaze on the knife. But I sure was twisted. I mean, I would get stabbed by that knife.

“I don’t mind. Hurry up before I change my mind. How much is it?”

“....Mh. Ehm, this much.”

Kirisaki shyly lifted one finger.

"10k yen, huh. It's expensive, but I can manage."

"It's 100k."

"So expensive!"

So damn expensive—!

"It's so expensive!"

"You don't really need to repeat it."

"100k, what the. Are they using diamonds for it or what?"

"That's not it. But a knife of such quality costs at least that much."

"But I mean, they're even selling knives at the 100yen-store these days..."

"I have around 70k saved up....No, it won't do. Sorry. Forget about it."

Kirisaki made a wry smile. I sighed and scratched my head.

"...So you just need the remaining 30k?"

"Well, yeah, sure..."

That was still expensive... I hesitated. But I suggested it already and raised her hopes, so betraying her now would be intolerable. After a moment of hesitation, I pulled out a few 10k yen notes.

"Here, go buy it."

"Kugito... are you sure?"

"Yeah. I said I would buy it for you, so I need to keep it at least partial."

For a while it'll be one rice ball for lunch now. Well, I'll last for a while with just water.

Kirisaki faltered for a moment, but took the notes when I presented her them with "Mm".

Then she entered the store with a "...Wait here a sec".

When she came out soon after, she was hugging onto a paper bag. She didn't even hide her joy.

"Did you get the one you wanted?"

"Yeah, I did. Now my errand is done. And quite satisfying at that."

Good to hear. Then we should be off. I was about to head off when Kirisaki shouted "Kugito".

"What?"

When I turned around, I stiffed up a bit.

"....Thanks."

There stood Kirisaki with her cheeks red and an innocent smile perfectly befitting a young girl.

"Ah, well, yeah. No prob...."

Keep yourself together, myself. Calm down. What was I getting excited for? That's Kirisaki! Remember how she usually acts! BE COOL, BE COOL, BE COOL!

"What's up?"

"Nothing. It's just, that is was like that and that's that."

That was like that and that's that. Yeah.

"I don't get it, but whatever. We better go back now."

"Y- Yeah."

I settled my breath and walked ahead. Kirisaki followed after me and said "Kugito" again.

"What?"



"Is there anything you want right now?"

"Huh? What's with that out of the blue?"

"Just answer."

I tilted my head on the sudden question and pondered. Let's see....

"A dishwasher, I guess. It's a pain to wash dishes for two by hand every day."

"Not something a young boy would usually wish for."

"Leave me alone."

"Fine. What would you do if you had one?"

"What you ask.... Well, I would test out how good it works."

"Yeah. That's how it have to be."

Kirisaki nodded a few times.

"So, Kugito."

Kirisaki's eyes sparkled like a puppy's when it begged for food. Aw, I was getting really worried. A BAD FEELING that visited me more often since we started dating. Exactly like that.

"...Don't stab me."

I decided to beat her to it.

"Rejected!"

It was in vain.

"It's a necessary ritual to get used to my new knife. C'mon, let's hurry to a place without people."

"Ehm, Kirisaki-san. Stabbing the person, who helped you buy it, right after, what's going on in your mind? Now it looks like I gave you the money so that you can stab me."

"You didn't?"

"Uwa! A misunderstanding about an impossible point! My good-will goes down the drain!"

"Haha. Well, don't sweat the details. Let's hurry."

NO-WAY-!

"...You said you want to try out your new knife, didn't you?"

"Yeah."

Ten minutes later. I stood in the same alley as before with holes all over my body.

"Normally when someone wants to try it out, wouldn't they just cut once? Why did I have to be stabbed ten times? Don't you know what 'holding back' means?"

"Holding back? First time I hear of it."

I didn't expect that.

"Well, just wrap some bandages around it and you're fine."

"That's not the problem."

"But a Randall knife is really in a different league. The sensation when I cut your skin, the clean cut and the ecstasy of cutting into your organs—"

There she goes again. Not hearing. I wasn't hearing anything. I wasn't anything of the maniac talk.

"By the way, Kugito."

"...What?"

"There's something I want you to do."

"You're going to stab me again!? I'm really at the end of my patience here!"
Actually, be grateful I haven't lost it until now!

"Hold it. Let's stop this crude talking about stabbing and what not."

"It was you, who made me start talking about this crude stuff!"

"...It's okay. As thanks for buying me the knife and the testing, I'll restrain myself for a while."

...I hoped so.

"So, what is it?"

"Well.... You know."

Kirisaki stuttered and looked down. It was quite scary when she behaved like a normal girl.

"C'mon, just say it. Our relationship isn't really at a stage where you need to act

embarrassed now.”

“You have a point—Well.”

For a while Kirisaki hesitated, then she raised her head at once. Now she said in a quiet voice.

“...Id hands.”

“Huh?”

I inquired. Kirisaki’s cheek turned lightly red as if she was angry. Then she said clearly.

“Your hand— I want to walk while holding your hand.”

Huh?

“What? Hoarding ants? Sorry, I’m not familiar with that language.”

“If you’re doing that on purpose, I’m going to stab you again.”

Hii.

“...No, well, I don’t mind. But why?”

“I sorta want to.”

“I see. But it’s a bit embarrassing.”

“It’s not a big deal. Or do you want to do something more embarrassing in a private room? I wouldn’t mind at all.”

I certainly did mind.....Anyway.

“Here.”

I put forth my hand. Kirisaki grabbed it with “...Mm”. While I wondered what a strange girl she was, since she made such a happy expression, I only noticed now how low her body temperature was.

Like that, Kirisaki and me walked the alley. For others we must have looked like a normal couple. Kirisaki too was just girl when she behaved normally. ... Though she wasn’t just a girl, since she normally couldn’t do so.

But if she would just behave like this all the time, it wasn’t such a bad thing to walk around like this. Kirisaki was a dangerous girl, but once you get over that, she wasn’t all that different from others. Surprisingly she was rather considerate about her surroundings (except to me) and paid a lot of attention to her actions (except to me). I’m sure she would be able to make more friends if I were to

agonize more from her. She might even be able to live the life of a normal high school girl.

I glanced to the side. Kirisaki was smiling.

"Are you that happy about the knife?"

"....Mh? Ah, well, that too."

"Too?"

"Well....Ehm, you know, it's my first."

At what?

"Walking hand in hand with a boy my age."

"Really? I thought you had dated a couple of guys already."

"...I not once had a deep relationship with anyone so far. Be it boys or girls."

Kirisaki said with a melancholic voice.

"Even if I made friends, it wouldn't be for long. What if I stab them. Or even kill them. Even when I know I'm not supposed to do it, my urges are stronger than my feelings. When I start to act, I'm no longer sane. I have no way to prevent that. So I actually shouldn't be able to get a lover. The more dear I hold someone, the more I have to keep away from him."

The words were stuck in my throat. Not considering Kirisaki's feelings, I had said something insensitive.

"...Sorry."

"Don't worry about it. And it's not like that anymore."

I tilted my head, whereupon Kirisaki looked up to me and smiled.

"I have you. Right now, I have you by my side. That's enough for me."

"You..."

I was at a loss for words, so I just looked up to the sky.

"...But it gnaws at my conscience that I dragged you into all this."

"What are you saying at this point?"

"It, It's not like I was all fine with it all. I always felt regret. It's just... You might call it selfishness, but still, I..."

Kirisaki increased the strength on her grip a bit.

"A bit longer, just a bit longer—With thoughts like that, I somehow made it this far. ...True, at this point it's....But I feel bad for the trouble I cause you."

I scratched my head. Like I thought, she was being weird today. When she said all that, I couldn't say anything back.

"...No I'm not really—"

At that moment.

My cell phone rang.

I swallowed down the words I was about to say and looked at the display. It was from Rin. I took the call.

"...Hello. Kuon? What's up with you? You're spreading your kindness again?"

"...."

"...Kuon? What's the matter?"

"...gi-chan?"

She was hard to hear. But it wasn't like the reception was bad, Rin's voice was just strangely scratchy.

"Sorry, can you say that again?"

"Kugi....-chan?"

"Yeah, it's me. Where are you right now?"

"...I.... sorry... might.... not make... there."

I got a bad feeling at Rin's broken speech. From time to time I could hear a leaking gasp. I had a really bad feeling.

"...Hey, Kuon, what's wrong?"

"I... sud...denly..."

"Where are you? I'll come over."

"....from behind.... Someone...."

A groaning voice. Panickiness crawled up my back.

"Hey, Kuon, are you okay? Just wait a bit, I'll come over real quick. Are you okay?"

"....Kugi...-chan...I...."

A WHACK could be heard. Then the line was suddenly cut.

"....What's up, Kugito?"

"....Sorry, Kirisaki. Kuon—Rin was being weird. I'm going."

I let go off her hand. I feel bad for her, but I had no time to explain the situation. I started sprinting with all my might.

"Hey, Kugito!?"

A creepy uneasiness came over me. A shapeless emotion gave the impulse and moved my body. I didn't know what had actually happened, yet a vision floated in my head. While desperately shaking off this ultimate despaired vision, I ran into a crowd and headed for the pointed destination. People became fewer. On a wide street a bit apart from the shopping street was no one. There I shouted.

"Kuon! Where are you!"

No answer. My uneasiness grew even greater.

"Kuon!"

While looking around, I spotted a familiar silhouette.

"Sis!"

"Kugito? Huh, even Kirisaki-san. What are you doing here?"

"Sis, have you seen Kuon... a girl with braids?"

"No. Why?"

"She's my friend. I got a strange call. Something might have happened—"

We could hear a scream. I turned around.

"Hey, Kugito, just what happened—"

I had no time to answer Kirisaki, who asked that. I dashed away. I could hear the two of them following after me. Hurry. Hurry. Hurry. Hurry. Hurry! My breathing increased. I had no feeling in my body. Still, I ran. I continued to run. Rin's face floated in my head.

A few people were peeking into a road between two buildings. "Move it!" I forcefully made my way through the curious onlookers onto the road.

...And then.

“—Kuon?”

I had arrived.

At the worst place ever.

Someone was laying face-down on the ground with a cell phone in one hand. When I saw something red on the back, my mind went black.

Something red. Something? Don't whitewash it! I scolded myself.

It was blood—

Blood was coming out of Rin's back and forming a red puddle on the concrete.

“Please make way!”

My sister's voice from behind. She made her way through the crowd, coming over to Rin.

I heard Kirisaki shouted 'Kugito'. But it felt so far away.

“Kuon....”

I was dumbfounded. Dejection was ruling over me. I couldn't believe the reality before my eyes. Just what had happened? Wasn't it supposed to be another peaceful, but boring day?

What was this?

What—was this!?

“Rin—”

I fell on my knees. I saw my sister calling someone on her cell phone. Everything felt like it was happening in a different world.

A voice poured out of my mouth. But it were only meaningless words.

An unstoppable something stirred up inside me from the bottom of my stomach. But my body wasn't listening to me and I could only continue to scream.

I was just miserable and reality went on, leaving me behind.

Chapter 05: Immortal Boy and solitary Knife

....It started raining. Water drops hit the only window of the waiting room in front of the operation room in the hospital. At first it were only a few, so that you could count them, but over time they got more and bigger. And ultimately they mixed together with the background and became like a waterfall.

The crepuscule room was scorched by an illumination. I raised my head with a catchy movement and stared at the red glowing lamp of the operation room.

To be honest, I didn't know how much time had passed.

No, to begin with, I wasn't even sure why I was here. I remembered up to the point where we found Rin, the ambulance came and she was carried inside on a stretcher. After that I somehow remembered some interaction with my sister, but anything further was unclear. It felt like a forcefully repaired film tear, which ended with me suddenly sitting here in the waiting room with my arms crossed. Kirisaki had disappeared at one point.

Rin's parents were sitting beside me with blue expressions. I had talked to them for a bit. It seemed Rin had told them about me on various occasions. About how we ate lunch together. About how we went home together. How I helped her when she had trouble. How she helped me. And how happy and joyful she looked while talking about it. Her parents thanked me. Her mother also told me that she had no friends before she entered high school because of her personality. Rin herself had just smiled it off, but deep down in her heart she must have been lonely. But shortly after she had entered Meitou Academy she had reported her mother that she made a single friend. And that was me. Apparently she praised me at a very kind, strong and amazing person. It was the first time that Rin had talked about someone else, so her mother had always been grateful to me.

So what? Yeah, what did it matter? What was so special about it? What exactly did I do? Rin was by far a more amazing person.

So why was it her that got attacked?

Me included, there were plenty of people in the world, whose death wouldn't sadden anyone.

I couldn't understand the egoist logic from those guys, who would attack someone like Rin. If something like fate really existed, on what grounds was it based on? If you call it fate that Rin was in a dying condition while others, who deserved that first, were still living a stupid life, then I would love to hear the answer to why it had to be like this. If it was merely decided by a roll of a dice, then it was just too unfair to her.

I was well aware that the asshole, who attacked Rin, was at fault. But I just

couldn't accept this world's injustice that made that guy choose Rin. There must be some kind of reason. Some kind of meaning. That was all that was going through my head.

I stood up. It wasn't like I wanted to go anywhere. But if I stayed here, I would only ponder about things that I couldn't solve, so I bowed to Rin's parents and left the room as to get a change of mood.

I pressed the elevator button and by chance the doors opened immediately.

When I was about to go inside, my cell phone rang. It was from my sister.

I took the elevator down to first floor, left the hospital and took the call while I watched the downpour.

"Hello?"

"Kugito?"

"Yeah."

"It's me. Do you have a moment?"

"Yeah. What's up?"

I could hear other voices in the background. After Rin was taken away to the hospital by the ambulance, my sister went to the police station and she was probably still there now.

"You know..."

"Mh?"

"I want you to listen to this calmly."

She started off like that, but then fell silent indecisive. So I knew it had to be about Rin's case. I rushed my sister with a "What's the matter?". After a "Yeah" followed by a short pause, my sister said.

"It's about.... Kuon Rin, your friend—"

For a moment I heard nothing but my sister's voice. Anything else seemed to be happen far away from me.

"...What did you say?"

My sister once again said "I want you to listen calmly".

"Your friend, Kuon Rin, was stabbed various times all over her body. And on her stomach—"

Something clicked in my head.

“—on her stomach there was a cross engraved with a knife.”

Then all the background noise came back to me. The rain echoed annoyingly loud in my ears.

“That....means?”

“We can’t be sure yet, but it’s quite likely— that Kuon-san was attacked by the <cross-slashing Devil>.”

“Why!”

I let out my voice uncontrolled.

“Why did that nutcase come to our town! WHY!?”

“Calm down, Kugito. We still don’t know if it was him. Nor if there was any reason behind it.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Even I don’t want to admit it, but—”

Hesitantly my sister continued.

“Listen, all those victims have nothing in common. Their age, occupation and living area are all different. That makes us believe that he picks his victims randomly. Kugito, what I mean is that Kuon-san was most likely a victim of a random assault.”

“...No way.”

That.... That couldn’t be. By chance? A coincidence? Are you telling me was attacked for a stupid, nonsense and ridiculous reason like that?

“She... She’s practically on her deathbed. She’s still under operation, but the worst case isn’t avoided yet. So... Why....”

“Kugito—”

“I... don’t believe that, Sis. There’s no way that’s possible.”

“...But Kugito, seeing the facts, that’s the only conclusion. Of course I don’t know any specifics, but I’m sure the investigation headquarters came to the same conclusion.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Kugito, face reality.....might be useless to tell you now. Okay. If that’s how you

feel, then so be it.”

My sister told me with a somewhat pitiful voice.

“If it makes you feel better, believe so. This might be cold, but that’s all I can say.... I’m sorry.”

With a CLICK the call was ended. I dropped my arms, scuffled over to a near bench and sat down.

I rested my head on my hands. Disordered thoughts went around in my head. Like Rin’s smile, her restlessly moving silhouette or waving her hand towards me. In short, the everyday life with Rin that I had believed would continue forever flashed in my mind.

It weren’t thoughts of love towards Rin.

It’s just that the life of the person, who I had admired and respected, got screwed over. Just like I had destroyed the life of my parents and sister, this meaningless injustice had hurt unrelated bystander and crushed her life.

“Why....”

Why was the world like this? Just why?

Someone answer me. Was the fact that the culprit, who attacked Rin, doesn’t get caught or the fact that I couldn’t die even though I wanted to, just meaningless and just because? It was out of our reach, so whatever happens, there was nothing we could do about it?

“I can’t laugh at this...”

Wasn’t there anything I could do?

“Damn!”

Nothing would come out of it, but I stroke a nearby pillar strongly.

At that moment.

“Kugito....”

A familiar voice. I raised my head. There stood a girl in the rain with an umbrella.

“....Kirisaki.”

Where did you go.

“Sorry. There was something on my mind, so I went home once. How’s Kuon Rin...?”

"I don't know. It seems her wounds weren't fatal, but she still lost too much blood"

"....I see."

Kirisaki folded her umbrella and stood in front of me.

"So? ... What was it that was on your mind?"

"Yeah, about that—"

Kirisaki nodded and opened her mouth.

"—No, this isn't a good place. Let's go to my room."

I entered her room, which hadn't changed from before. Kirisaki started up her notebook and I sat beside her to look at the display.

"...Kugito."

"Mh?"

While moving the mouse, Kirisaki said.

"Wouldn't you say that Kuon Rin was attacked by a fake <Midnight killing Devil>?"

I widened my eyes. "...Why would you say that?"

"I'll explain now."

While typing on the keyboard, Kirisaki continued.

"While the possibility was low, when I heard that Kuon Rin was attacked, a hint of uneasiness befell me. That maybe a mimicking <Midnight killing Devil> appeared. Of course there was no reason to it. So while I prayed that I'm wrong, I opened this page."

The page shown on the display was <Alice Tea Party>.

"I always kept track of the actions of the fake <Midnight killing Devil>, meaning <March Hare's> actions— After the murder of a man, he wrote on the forum that he did that himself."

More typing on the keyboard. The post that showed up had the same arrogant tone like the one from before.

"Today in OO City, XY District a man was killed. That was me. Our God is dead. From this day on, I'll be the new <Midnight killing Devil>."

"Bastard..."

There were a lot of replies, but <March Hare> didn't respond to any of them.

Probably because a God wouldn't exchange words with mere mortals so easily.

"But <March Hare> answered this reply alone."

It was located further down. Moving the mouse, she scrolled down. There was written.

"It was in the news. You have no proof. Aren't you just lying?"

Then followed quite a lot of approvals for that comment.

"Maybe it hurt his pride, but <March Hare> answered like this."

Kirisaki stopped her fingers. I looked at where Kirisaki pointed.

"Fine. Then I'll write here about the next one before it runs in the news."

"This is..."

"Yeah. That's why I thought that maybe the assault this time would be written here and took a look. And then."

Kirisaki returned to the index, which showed the latest posts.

"...Something beyond my expectation took place."

She clicked on a post with the title "To the former Midnight killing Devil".

"Today, in Meitou City at a back alley near the Meitou Station, I stabbed a single girl to near death. I'm sure the news will report about it later. Are those, who bantered me, satisfied now?"

But that's not all for today. There will be another one later. This isn't meant for the plebs that gather here, but just for one person: The former <Midnight killing Devil>.

I respected you. No, you can say I worshipped you.

But your crimes lately are too rubbishy. They're lacking your former glamour.

That's why I decided to act as the <Midnight killing Devil> in your stead. I did that because I believed that by doing so you would come to hate me and return to your previous artistic killer self.

But you not only failed my expectation, you also stopped your crimes all together. I don't know what happened to you, but I'm gravely disappointed. So I came to a new conclusion. That you are dead. Our God is dead, so someone will act in his stead. I'm the only one suited for the task.

But first I need you to receive retribution. I have to judge you for soiling the

sacred title of <Midnight killing Devil>.

The reason I didn't kill that girl today, was merely to introduce the prologue. I didn't choose that girl by chance."

What...? This went into a different direction from what I imagined, but I frowned.

"I know everything about you. And when I say everything, I mean <everything>. I can hear a <voice>. The voice of <God's child> is telling me everything.

It won't be only that girl. From now on I'll kill everyone related to you, not leaving anyone. Those you hold dear or those you know briefly, everyone. This is your punishment. I have to judge the sinner."

--.

I felt like I received a heavy blow to my head. Completely clueless, I held down my forehead. I let out a long sigh.

"—Is he.... Is he serious?"

Kirisaki looked at me. Then she nodded positive.

"...I fear so. Since Kuon Rin was actually attacked, we have no choice but to think so."

"Then... it's no coincidence that he came to this city?"

"Yeah."

"And that Kuon got attacked too?"

"Yeah."

"....How? How comes he knows all that?"

Kirisaki shook her head.

"...I don't really know. I'm worried about that god's voice. Kuon Rin and me don't know each other for long. Yet he was informed about it. That makes me believe that this <God's voice> really has past and present data about me. But is that even possible...?"

I didn't know. Too much things that I didn't understand.

But— That wasn't important right now. I felt like I only got more confused the more I tried to sort my thoughts.

Then suddenly— a single thought flashed in my head.

"Kirisaki."

I mumbled.

"Then, it's like that?"

On my dry voice, Kirisaki turned to me with an inquiring expression. While I pressed my hands against my mouth, I felt my emotions squeezing out from my throat.

"You—"

I felt like being skewed. Without really understanding what I was going to say, the words spilled out of my mouth.

"—You're the reason that Kuon got attacked?"

Kirisaki widened her eyes. I continued.

"I mean.... Isn't that so. When all these related to you get attacked, that's how it plays out."

"Kugito..."

I knew that my emotions were taking a path that they shouldn't. I wanted to stop it. But in the end that was the conclusion I reached.

I could neither stop it, nor try to stop it.

"....."

Before I noticed it, I was smiling. Normally, with my sanity that wouldn't be possible, but just this time I was showing a smile without knowing it. At first it was small, then it spread gradually. While showing a smile that I couldn't suppress, I mumbled.

"Oh wow."

With raised corners of my mouth, I said.

"That's how it turns out. There was no way that there was any logic behind the attack on Rin. Yeah. It was your fault. Because I meddle with a killer like you, Rin got acquainted with you. And the result is this."



Kirisaki opened her mouth to say something, but I ignored her and went on.

"I was naive. I was stupid. I thought that if I were a bit more tolerant, I could date you like normal. But yeah, you're different. You're different from Rin and me. You're the kind of human, who can still live on normally after killing a person. It's your fault. It's your fault that Rin got attacked."

I knew myself that I was spouting nonsense. But that was all I could think of. I believed it to be the only answer to resolve this injustice.

"Back then I should have reported you to the police after all. Then that impersonator would have lost interest in you and Rin wouldn't have gotten attacked. Because I was an utter fool and full of naive thoughts it turned out like this."

"Kugito...."

"Don't call my name!"

I pushed away her hand that she extended towards me. The inside of my head was a mess. I stood up. Kirisaki made a dumbfounded expression that I never saw on her before.

"Can you still make any excuses? Can you still give me a satisfying explanation to why it isn't your fault that Rin got attacked? C'mon, isn't that your speciality?"

Kirisaki didn't say anything. She just looked at me dumbfounded. I averted my gaze and hit my strongly clenched fist against the wall. It made a creaking sound. The rain got stronger.

After a while, I could see Kirisaki bow down in the corner of my vision. With a faint smile and halting, Kirisaki said.

"...I can't."

"Huh?"

I shifted my gaze back to her. Kirisaki, with her head lowered, had crossed her fingers atop her skirt.

"I can't do that. Yeah....it's exactly like you said. This is... my fault."

Her voice wasn't resolute like usually. It were just dejected and downfallen words. Like a scolded kid, Kirisaki had stiffened up, just enduring my outburst.

"Yeah, like you said, I should have turned in myself to the police. I also believe I could lead a normal life when I have you around me. That was indeed naive. As someone, who committed a crime, I should have done this earlier. ... Sorry. Not like an apology will solve anything, but still—"

Kirisaki faced me and deeply bowed her head.

"I'm sorry. It's all my fault that this happened to Kuon Rin."

I didn't know how to react to that. What good would it do to blame her any more?

Kirisaki stood up slowly.

"...I'll definitely take responsibility for this."

"What are you going to do?"

"That's of no concern for you. You better get out of here quickly. And don't get involved with me anymore. You can forget about our promise."

"But you—"

"Kugito!"

Kirisaki raised her voice, then said.

"...Hurry and get out of here. Please."

I remained silent. Kirisaki turned her back to me and didn't say anything more. Her shoulders were slightly shaking.

"....Okay."

I turned around, walked to the door and grabbed the doorknob.

When I opened the door, Kirisaki said.

"Kugito."

I stayed silent and she continued.

"Thanks for up till now."

At a loss for what to reply, I ended up leaving without saying anything.

I closed the door behind me.

A sound of alienation faintly echoed amidst the rain.

Shapeless thoughts spun around in my head and mingled with my worries. Before I knew it, I stood in front of the hospital, which Rin was admitted to.

Folding the umbrella in my right hand, I sat down on a bench.

The rain didn't seem to let down, rather it intensified. I just sat there alone, doing nothing.

After a small sigh, I rested my chin on my palm.

My heart felt bitter. I felt repulsion and a disgust different from throwing up. I shook my head.

“...Damn.”

My irritation got worse. I didn’t know myself where this feeling was coming from.

I had thought she would be able to manage it better. I had thought she would ensnare me with her finickiness like always and while I was uncertain she would forcefully make me agree even if I had a different opinion.

Yet she admitted to it so easily.

—This is... my fault.

Her expression when she said that flickered in my mind. I didn’t say anything wrong. It was just that the expression she showed me stirred up something within me. She looked just so,

....just so sad.

I was angry about something. Trying to figure out about what for a long period, I ended up being angry about myself for not being resolute.

Rin ended up like that because she had contact to Kirisaki.

That was why I hate Kirisaki.

But on the other side, there was a part of myself that couldn’t fully agree to that.

Not knowing what I really wanted to do, I felt like I was strangling myself.

How many hours had passed like this?

I wondered how long I had been like this and how much longer I would continue to stay like this.

At any rate, what brought me back to my senses was a voice calling “Node-san”.

I raised my head and look that way uncertain.

Rin’s mother stood in the entrance.

While coming over, she said.

“Node-san, Rin is—”

With an increased breathing, she showed a smile for the first time.

“—Rin is awake now.”

Please don't agitate her. She's still in a critical condition.

That was what the doctor told me. While nodding in affirmation, I entered the sick room.

Rin was silently laying on the hospital bed with her eyes closed like she was sleeping while attached to a respiratory system. But she then opened her eyes as she sensed my presence.

When I draw closer, she gave off a small smile.

“Yo.”

Not knowing what I should do, I raised my hand and gave myself a wry smile to the stupid 'Yo'. Her parents were probably considerate, as they left the room when I entered.

“Are you okay?.....Guess that's a stupid question.”

Rin forced herself to smile. I took a nearby chair and sat down on it. Rin opened her mouth to say something, but her face immediately distorted in pain. Talking must be painful to her too.

“...Sorry. You don't need to force yourself to speak.”

When I said that, Rin nodded and formed a “Sorry” with her lips.

“Don't mind it....Seems like you'll be in the hospital for a while.”

Rin slightly shook her head. Judging by the situation it didn't seem like she meant to disagree, but that she didn't know.

I said “I see” and fell silent afterwards. I couldn't really stay here for long.

“...Anyway, I'm glad you regained consciousness. You must be tired. I'll go home for today. When you feel better, I'll drop by again.”

Rin nodded and said “Thanks” without a voice. With a “It's fine” I stood up.

At that moment, Rin looked beside me. She looked at the nothingness there, then turned her gaze back to me. That behavior looked like so wanted to ask something. I scratched my head and said.

“Kirisaki... isn't here.”

Rin blinked. I made a slight sigh. I couldn't answer immediately. I started with a “Well...”, whereupon Rin said to me with a quiet voice.

"....A fight?"

"Not exactly...."

If that wasn't it, then what was it? I asked myself, but not getting an answer, it were weasel words. I wanted to say something appropriate, but I couldn't. I felt that no matter what I said, it would only sound like excuses in front of her.

"....I don't know if it's a fight."

Rin listened silently.

"I one-sided told her what I wanted and then we parted."

Rin nodded slightly. She didn't do anything else to blame me, nor to comfort me. For some reason I suddenly felt awkward being here. Rin was just looking at me.

And then—time-wise only a few minutes had passed, but to me it felt like hours in this white room, when Rin suddenly opened her mouth.

"...Kugi-chan."

"Like I said, don't force—"

"Don't leave...."

With a weak, yet appealing voice Rin said.

"...Don't leave... Kirisaki-san....alone, okay."

"....Eh?"

Rin closed her eyes. Her breathing was heavy. I hastily tried to stop her from speaking any more.

"Hey..."

"Please—"

Interrupting me, Rin said something. But I couldn't hear it well. I draw closer and squatted beside her.

At that time, Rin lightly grabbed on my sleeve with her extended hand. That was all. She must have been at her limit. She was barely exerting any strength. Rin stopped moving just like that.

"....Hey, Kuon? Are you okay?"

Unrest befell me. But that was only for a moment, as soon afterwards Rin started to make small sleeping sounds, which relieved me. She most likely overexerted herself. I looked down on my sleeve, where I felt a light touch. Rin still hadn't let

go. Not really forcing myself, I stayed there for a while. I repeated Rin's words in my head.

—Don't leave Kirisaki-san alone, okay.

She just might have wanted to tell me to make up with her. But I heard a different meaning in it.

A wry smile formed at my mouth.

"You're... worrying about others even at a time like this."

Man, that ticked me off.

I thought what a narrow-minded human I was.

Well, I actually was.

I should learn a bit from Rin.

"Don't leave her alone, huh."

Rin's word and her heart that made her watch out for others at the cost of pain for herself made me regain my composure.

....Actually I knew it all along, didn't I?

That the thing I was supposed to do was at least not to push her away. That there was no point in doing so. And that it was the reason for my irritation.

I knew— Yet I—

"...I'm such a weak human."

Throughout the worst. I already knew it, but not to this extent.

"...."

I gently loosened Rin's hand and put it back on the bed. I looked up at the ceiling, took a deep breath of the room's air and made a long sigh.

"....Okay."

I stood up, turned heel and walked away.

And I mumbled.

"Thank you—Rin."

I grabbed the doorknob.

“—Off I go.”

I quietly opened the door.

And then I started moving to do that what I was supposed to do.

The rough rain hit my body and I was soaked to the bone in no time. The umbrella was no longer of any use.

My baseless idea that she would be at the site of crime after she claimed to take responsibility, made me come to the station.

While running through the crowd of people, I looked for Kirisaki.

The rain clouded my vision. My soaked sneakers made a splashing sound.

I bumped into a couple of people, who gave me an annoyed look, but I still continued to call her name.

Could it be I was doing an utterly stupid thing? Such a thought crossed my mind. If it was her, Kirisaki Kyouko, then she wouldn't choose a method like me. It was unthinkable that she would choose a baseless and primitive method. Still, I didn't know any other method, so I just continued to shout her name.

I wonder how long I did it.

My throat and feet started to hurt. My clothes were all wet, which made it hard to move. While panting for air, I bended my knees and rested my hands on them.

“Damn.... It's no good?”

Obviously. There was no way she would be here. But what else should I do? What would she do? If it was her—

“—Now that I think about it, I don't know anything about her..”

No, it might be more correct to say I didn't try to know anything about her. Because there was no need to. She said she needed me. But that was only to make use of me. There wasn't a need for mutual understanding. That was what I thought.

But was that really so?

Didn't I somewhere in my head understand it?

That there was no way she would be able to live a normal life after killing a person.

That her arrogant behavior, her conceited tone, everything was proof that her real self had never been in contact with anyone.

That she surely wanted to escape from the ban that aggrieved her own life.

That the expression she wore when we walked together was real.

I was supposed to understand it.

About what she expected from me.

Yet I only pushed my own emotions onto her.

I wanted to put the blame on someone. I wanted to put the blame on something.

I made her, who was the closest by, shoulder it all.

My confused mind guided me to the simplest and easiest way out.

That was the worst and lowest thing to do.

I knew all that and I knew that she would be hurt the most by saying that, yet I.
Yet I only thought about myself—-Damn it.

“Kirisaki...”

I said her name with a fragile voice. It was immediately swallowed up by the sound of the rain.

But—

“What’s the matter, Kugito.”

I turned around.

There stood Kirisaki Kyouko.

“....Kirisaki.”

“You’re looking for something?”

Kirisaki came over to me, who was dripping wet without an umbrella, and tilted her head with a “Mh?”.

“Right back at you.... What are you doing here?”

“Can’t you tell by looking?”

Kirisaki shrugged.

“Looking for the culprit.”

“....In this large crowd?”

"The culprit is after those related to me, so he has to stay in this city. For that he obviously needs to stay at a hotel. So I checked every business hotel here, if lately there checked in anyone for a longer period, or at least for longer than a month."

I see. But that had low chance of success. Since the world was rather fussy about personal information right now and not to forget that he might commute from his own house.

"Certainly. But I didn't know of any other way than to go searching hit-or-miss."

"....There's a better way than that."

"What?"

"I think we'll find him on the first try. It's quite reliable method."

"Really?"

"Yeah. But for that we two need to work together."

"Then it's no good."

Kirisaki shot down my idea.

"Why?"

"You stay out of this. You said it earlier."

"That earlier was... well, my fault. I said too much."

"Don't worry about it. It's the truth. So you too don't get involved with me anymore. Stay with Kuon Rin."

"It's not like that. You know, what I want to say is"

"...If you're going to pity me, stop it. I'll be fine."

"That's not it."

"Either way, this is my responsibility. I have an obligation to resolve this by myself."

Kirisaki turned around and walked away.

"Hey wait, Kirisaki!"

"Rest assured. I won't cause any trouble for you anymore."

"And I'm telling you it's not like that!"

"I'll be fine alone."

"That's not it!"

She— Gnar—!

Here I was looking for her to apologize and I got this. She could at least listen to me for a bit. Ah, I was getting angry. Damn, why did I have to go through this. Aww, what a pain. That was why I hated dealing with people. Fuck, I didn't care anymore!

"Kirisaki!"

I draw closer, grabbed her by the shoulder and turned her around.

"....What?"

"Stay still for a bit."

Kirisaki's big eyes were looking at me. I swallowed my saliva.

"Kugito...?"

"Be quiet."

I took a deep breath. She got wary and asked "What are you going to do?", but she didn't shake me off. Not just that, she relaxed as to entrust her body to me. I spit out all the air in my lungs. Then I said "Good".

"Don't move."

Then my head moved towards Kirisaki's—

"Ah..."

But that was just a faint and I pulled my head backwards, only to give her a full power headband.

"—!"

Kirisaki widened her eyes, hold onto her forehead and stepped back.

"Wh- What are you doing!"

"Heh, did you think I would kiss you? You're such a romantic, Kirisaki."

"Who would desire that! What's the idea!?"

"I just stopped caring about a lot of things. And being considerate is a pain too. I'll have you listen to what I have to say, Kirisaki."

I resolute pointed at Kirisaki.

"Listen! I'm at fault for earlier. Let me apologize for that. I'm sorry."

"No, I'm not really—"

"Next, after I thought about it, when you're responsible, so am I!"

"...What?"

"Listen well, Kirisaki. I'm saying that I'm dating you."

I went on.

"What does it mean to date someone? Just going home together after school? Or to eat together? Shopping together? I at least think that's not it."

Yeah. I knew it all along. I just didn't want to admit it. I was just running away from the responsibility like a kid.

"I dated you with the determination to accept everything about you. That's why everything that concerns you, also concerns me. I decided so myself. If I don't see that through till the end, my promise with you will become a lie."

"Kugito...."

"Let's go it together, Kirisaki."

I stepped closer. Kirisaki made a perplexed expression. I grabbed her by her neck and forcefully pulled her close to me.

"We can pull it off, definitely."

Kirisaki's hand pawed in the air in confusion. I took her hand in mine and said.

"Sorry for going on all by myself. But for now I won't leave you alone."

Kirisaki didn't respond anything and her face lightly hit on my chest.

"...You're an idiot. That can hardly be the correct choice."

Yeah. But I'll don't sweat the details anymore.

I just decided so.

"For now, wipe your hair with this."

I had a desperate fight with my shoes, as they were hard to take off because they were so soaked, when Kirisaki handed me a towel. I took the towel and raised my head simply to say my thanks, when Kirisaki faced me directly.

“....”

For some reason, I fell silent. Kirisaki also didn't say anything while exchanging looks with me and simply gazed at me.

...This was rather awkward.

“...Say something.”

“I only gave you a towel. I have nothing else to say. If someone has to say something, it should be you saying ‘thanks’, no?”

She hit the nail on the head, but for some unknown reason, I couldn't say it. Talking normally with her like before was rather difficult.

I see. That was how it felt to make up after a fight.

While I technically apologized, the fact remains that I hurt her and I didn't know how to face her now.

Kirisaki was equivalent troubled. And for some reason I could see some anxiety in her behavior.

“...I'll get you a change of clothes. Though I only have my father's.”

“Why do you have your father's clothes?”

“I thought it might be effective to ward off underwear thieves, so I brought them with me.”

What were you, an office lady living on her own?

Kirisaki crossed the living room and disappeared in the back. I finally got my shoes off and came inside. For starters, I wiped my wet hair with the towel. I sighed for no apparent reason. That why people, who had no deep relationship with anyone before, were troublesome. They had an immense lack of experience and when they finally get a partner, it becomes awkward on various fronts.

But I had to say, I was soaked splendidly. I was completely wet down to my underwear.

I looked at the back. It seemed that Kirisaki wasn't coming back yet.

I hesitated for a bit, but decided to take off my clothes. I exposed my upper body and wiped it dry with the towel. I put the clothes I took off on the hanger, even though I felt bad since I didn't ask for permission.

Next I lowered my gaze onto my trousers.... What should I do about this? I thought that also taking off the bottom would go too far, but considering it was only Kirisaki anyway, I changed my mind. Even if she never went that far, she

should have at least seen a man naked. I also got the feeling that she would laugh scornfully at me if our positions were reversed.

Pondering about this and that, I decided to take off my trousers as well, since it felt unpleasant in the wet clothes. I loosened the belt, took them off and put them on the hanger like the other clothes. As for my trunks...No, that would really be going too far. But what was the difference from when I wrapped my bottom half with a towel? At a loss what to do, I kept putting my finger on the trunks and removing them again.

Suddenly.

"Here I am. Seems I put them away far in the back. They're a bit big, but it somehow—"

Her voice suddenly stopped.

I turned her way.

For some reason, she had frozen up. While carrying man's clothes, she was all stiff with widened eyes. Even I didn't know what to do, so I just raised my hand.

"...Yo."

BAM!

The sliding door was closed.

"...What the hell are you doing!"

"Well, all these wet clothes felt unpleasant."

"Even then, you think nothing of stripping down to your trunk in a girl's room?"

"You say girl, but it's just you. Why should I show reservation?"

"Anyway, just put on some clothes. Right now. At once. As soon as possible. Faster than the light. Hurry up!"

Sure, sure. Then give me the clothes.

The sliding door opened a bit and a hand appeared. A shirt and trousers dropped onto the floor. While thinking what a weird girl she was, I picked up the clothes, put away the towel and wore the shirt and trousers. While I buttoned up the shirt, I said.

"You can come in now."

"I hope you're not lying."

"Why would I lie?"

"So you say, but I hope you're not standing there butt naked with your arms spread when I open the door."

"What do you expect me to do?"

The door opened up to a little gap. Kirisaki peeked through it. I tilted my head and asked "What's up with you?". Then the door opened completely. Kirisaki came inside.

"Seriously. Normally such an event would be the other way around."

What?

"....Hey, are you okay?"

"What you mean?"

I pointed at Kirisaki.

"Your face is red."

Her reaction was large. She leaned backwards and covered it with her hands at the same time.

"Th- That's not true!"

"Then why are you hiding your face?"

"I, I'm not hiding it! I'm just trying to tear of my skin!"

Scary!

"If you're going to make an excuse, choose a better one! When you say it, it doesn't sound like a joke."

"How rude."

The finally took down her hands and coughed. But her cheeks were still slightly red.

....Hey, could it be she.

"You..."

"Wh- What?"

"....I think that's not possible, but I'll ask just in case."

"Okay."

“You—” I asked “ aren’t saying that you never saw a man naked, are you?”

Kirisaki said calmly.



"I have not."

"NOT!?"

"No."

"You're lying!"

"I'm not."

"But you talked to me about masturbation and sex with an arrogant expression!"

"This and that are different."

"What is different?"

"What, well... Basically, seeing you naked is—No, forget it. Anyway, the idea that it's okay to be naked in front of me is screwed up."

"Well, yeah.... Aww, damn it. Somehow I got embarrassed now. That's your fault."

"I think it's your fault for getting butt naked in front of a girl."

"I wasn't butt naked! I was still wearing my trunks!"

"F- For a girl, who never saw a man naked, it doesn't matter if you wear them or not!"

"It matters! It's an important matter of seeing it or not! Would you allow star marks on the nipples of a gravure model!?"

"I would! That leaves more place for imagination!"

"I bet you're the type that looks at mosaics with squinted eyes, aren't you! And when you see an uncensored one, you babble about how it's unneeded since it's disgusting!"

"Is that bad? Everything needs a craving for it!"

"That's why you're still a virgin!"

"You're a virgin yourself!"

"D- Don't say it!"

"Okay, fine!"

Kirisaki said and started to unbutton her shirt.

"Wh- What are you doing!"

"I'll show everything of me too. Then we're even."

"Stop it, Idiot. I don't want to see that!"

"WHAT!? I'm quite famous when I take off my clothes, you know!?"

"To whom!"

"My inner self!"

Just a self-assessment!?

"I don't believe that!"

"Then look and judge for yourself!"

"Stop iiiit!"

Kirisaki was seriously going to strip, so chopped her vertex.

"Oww!"

"Give it a rest already!"

"It's your fault!"

"No, yours!"

"What!"

"Got a problem with that?"

Kirisaki looked up to me and I looked down to her. For a while we stared at each other. Like that a couple of seconds passed.

Then,

"....So stupid."

I was the first to stop.

"Indeed."

Kirisaki agreed.

And then we two burst into laughter nearly at the same time.

"So stupid."

"Quite so."

For a while, we laughed. I felt the awkward feeling from before disappear. There

was no need to wreck my brain. This exchange was most suited for our relationship. I confident thought that.

"....Geez."

"Kugito."

Kirisaki had stopped laughing and called my name.

"What?"

"You said there's another method."

My expression became serious again. Right, that was our original topic.

"...Yeah, there is."

"How does it go?"

"It's quite simple. Start up your notebook."

Kirisaki tilted her head, said "Okay" and went over to the notebook. She switched it on.

"What are you going to do?"

"Access the <Alice Tea Party> page on the internet."

Kirisaki made a perplexed expression, but did as I told her. "To the BBS next" On my instruction, the familiar forum appeared.

"Good. Now write down what I tell you."

"Ok."

I told her the matter. Kirisaki widened her eyes in surprise.

"Hey, that's..."

"Yeah, that's the only way for now."

"....Certainly. How could I fail to notice this simple thing?"

No real surprise. It was a plan that only worked with the two of us.

"Right. Okay, I get it. Let's carry it out."

Kirisaki typed on the keyboard. Then she clicked the publish button. A new thread was made.

Good, now was left to see if <March Hare> would fall for it or not—

For now the preparations were complete.

Don't get cocky, Imposter. Towards the nutcase <Midnight killing Devil> that I never met, I thought.

Don't think we'll accept this injustice world forever.

Chapter 06: Immortal Boy and imitated Madness

<He> loitered around the street.

Because of the previous incident (the girl had survived like expected) that <he> caused, there were more policemen on the move.

But <he> didn't pay it any mind. For <his> goal of getting close to God, <he> didn't dread any methods. For a long period of time, <he> had learned various skills and read so many books that they buried <his> room. The result was that <his> battle skills raised rapidly. Disposing of one or two policemen was an easy task.

But attracting attention was out of the question. Unnecessary actions that disturb the original goal weren't allowed.

Goal....Yes, today <he> had a goal.

<He> wasn't so aimless until before. <He> had a fixed target— Yeah, it was a mission.

There was a challenge from God.

No, to be precise from the former God.

<He> didn't waver at all for <his> destination.

No, actually it said <he> should aim higher if <he> were to surpass God.

When you can do it, that is—

<He> laughed interested. That was how it should be. It would be troublesome if God were to give up his seat so easily.

<He> opened his cell phone. It was packed with information from <God's child> —data about the <Midnight killing Devil>. Her real name, her gender, her height, her weight, the name of her school, her environment and the names of people related to her.

But.... <He> pondered. Who was that <God's child>, who approved of <him> and helped out so much. The information from <God's child> included data that went beyond personal information. Even if these were obtained by hacking into various places, the effort invested couldn't be measured. What's more, that all was just to support <him>. <He> thought that there must be some profound reason that <he> didn't understand.

Anyway. That wasn't important right now.

<He> looked for the target. The silhouette of the next victim that God had chosen.

As usual, there were a lot of people. There wasn't anything more annoying. It would be hard to find the target like that. Was it even possible to find a single person in this crowd?

No, it'll be okay. <He> reassured <himself>. <He> was the one to overcome God. If so, then everything should come along as <he> wants. If <he> convinced <himself> that <he> would be successful, then <he> should be in reality too.

That was what <he> believed. Yeah, it would definitely happen. Just by walking around like this, <his> feet would naturally lead him to the target--

Then.

".....!"

<He> widened his eyes. It came so sudden that <his> reaction was a bit delayed. In a hurry <he> opened his cell phone.....No doubt.

<His> mouth grimaced.

"....Bingo."

Yeah, <he> knew it. <He> was a chosen human. The one and only existence close to God. Such a coincidence was just impossible.

<He> fastened his pace and approached from behind.

Right now wasn't good. There were too many people.

Hurry up and become alone. Become alone. Become alone. Become alone. Become alone.

<He> anxiously prayed so, when the target changed his movement. The destination was a small alley between two buildings.

...Oh my god.

That it went so well, scared <him>. Everything was going let <he> wanted it to.

The target left the main street in front of the station and entered the back alley. Where was it going? It was proceeding into a small place void of people.

This was fate. That was what <he> thought. Just now <he> received a divine message from God.

Namely, to kill without hesitation.

<He> put <his> hand into the pocket. With an accustomed movement, <he> pulled out the knife from the sheath. The tip shaved a bit against the wall and made a dull sound.

Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. Kill. KillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKillKill
KillKill.

Only one thought filled <his> head. At that moment, <he> sprinted.

(Kill)

Kill.

(Gauge)

Kill.

(Pierce)

<He> held his breath.

"Kill--"

<He> raised a queer voice. The target turned around. No hesitation. There was no reason to. At the same time as <he> jumped in, <he> grabbed the target's shoulders and push it down. The target screamed in pain. Truly pleasant. <He> raised the knife. The silver lightened in the dimly. <He> laughed. Loudly, so it echoed. A lucky roar that was fun, adorable and happy at the same time.

Then—

<He> stabbed.

First an attack into the shoulder. A scream. When the knife was drawn out, blood gushed out. Next the flank. Then the back. After that the neck. Shoulder, Flank, Back, Neck. ShoulderFlankBackNeckShoulder

F flank Back Neck Shoulder F flank Back Neck Shoulder F flank Back Neck

ShoulderFlankBackNeck--

"H, Hihi--Hyaa--Hahahahaha!"

Red blood. Gouged flesh. Scattered around. Danced around. Fulfil the mission. The entrusted, important role. To become God. To become supreme.

Die. Die. DieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieDie

DieDieDieDieDieDieDieDie!

"Diiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!"

<He> shouted with all his might. Then the raised tip of the knife went down straight into the target's body without hesitation.

A dull sound of cutting deep into flesh.

The target mumbled something quietly and reached out it's hand into the air, but it fell down soon enough without grabbing on anything.

No matter how often <he> saw a person's death, it was always so pleasant. The darkness of despair that they spouted when their life was taken away helplessly was just too exciting.

"It's done..."

The corners of <his> mouth raised up in satisfaction. <He> stood up slowly. The target was dead. Now God had to accept <him>. And God would say that <he> was the true <Midnight killing Devil>.

"Dead as a mutton—"

<He> couldn't suppress his laughter while bending backwards and raising his voice.

"Just now, I killed him—!"

And then—

"...Sorry."

—The target turned around.

"—!?"

<He> was confused and entangled <his> legs by stepping backwards. Inadvertently <he> fell onto the backside. Before <him> calmly stood the target covered in blood.

"Wh—Why—!?"

"If you don't know, I'll tell you."

The target— The one the <Midnight killing Devil> nominated on the forum with "Kill him if you can".

Node Kugito turned his raised thumb upside down.

"I, won't die."

<March Hare> made a perplexed expression. Different from the mad actions from

earlier, he looked extremely human now.

"It seems like you don't get it, so I'll explain it."

I put my hand on my waist and pointed at <March Hare>.

"You were fooled."

The one, who told Kirisaki to write a provoking post on the forum, was me.

My plan (though it couldn't really be called one) was simple.

<March Hare> had announced that he would go after those related to Kirisaki, so basically, we could narrow down his possible targets. And along with that thought, if we were to point to one, he would shamelessly come to kill it and we would be able to catch him red-handed. Obviously, we couldn't use just anyone for it. In the past and even now, sacrificing someone for the sake of something was nonsense. But we had a breach of rules on our side.

The one of me being <immortal>.

Once that was thought up, the rest was easy. We uploaded the post "Don't think that this will cow me. Try it if you can" on the forum and added my real name. The so called bait. The killer would unlikely think I'm immortal and fall for it, so we initiated it.

The result was as you could see. When you thought about it a bit, it seemed suspicious, but for the part that he acted arrogant he lacked a part of his brain.

"No way... Can't be..."

<March Hare> mumbled with a face of disbelief. Like that, he looked like a perfectly normal guy. His age was a bit above mine. His unoiled hair was cut dishevelled and on his chin grew stubbles.

"Face reality, you fake."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Was it fun to play the <Midnight killing Devil>? You sure had your way there."

I bended my knees and brought my face closer. I opened my mouth.

"....C'mon, say something, murderer."

"....Sh- Shut up!"

I reached my hand into my pocket. I stepped half a step backwards with a "Whoops". In the space, where I stood until just now, a silver line mowed.

“How dangerous.”

<March Hare> had stood up agitated and held up his knife. I scratched my head.

“Geez.... So incompetent.”

“Incompetent... you say?”

“I mean you. You’re a half-assed bastard, who can only imitate others.”

“I... I’m not incompetent....”

Swinging his knife, <March Hare> shouted.

“I’m a chosen existence! A superior human that will surpass God and become a new God!”

“For some reason, a believer always says such stuff. Do you lack self-confidence?”

“Shut up, low-life! What’s wrong with killing people! I’m doing these useless scum a favour by sublimating them with the high art of murder! Appreciate me more! Praise me more! Respect me! Worship me! You guys are just trash! I’m an artist that turns useless trash into a piece of art!”

“What cheap words. You got some from some book?”

“Shut up! As if you could understand it! No, not just you! Everyone is just going on about stupid crap like university, job or grades. No one tries to understand me! The only one to take me side is God!”

“You mean the <Midnight killing Devil>?”

“Yeah! Haha— Right now, she has fallen, but she’s the only one, who understands me! When I saw her killing for the first time, I shuddered! It’s her. There’s no one else I could learn from!”

“Oh really.”

While scratching my neck, I faced behind the guy and said.

“—So he says. What do you think, God?”

<March Hare> turned around with cramps of surprise.

“Mh, let’s see.”

A shadow hid the light that shone in from the back entrance of the alley. The appeared girl, Kirisaki Kyouko said.

“To say it in terms of a divine message—-He’s a damn bastard that runs his mouth.”

"!You—!"

"This is the first time we meet face-to-face, <March Hare>."

Kirisaki smiled.

"I'm the <Midnight killing Devil>. Though <former> now."

<March Hare> looked alternately at Kirisaki and me. Then he said moaning.

"God, why... with a guy like him. Even though—I'm the only one who understands you."

"My name is Kirisaki Kyouko. Don't call me by the embarrassing name God."

Kirisaki started walking.

To the alarmed <March Hare>, Kirisaki said.

"Well, what now. We could just hand you over to the police now."

"Just try it! I'll kill anyone!"

While pointing the tip of his knife, <March Hare> shouted.

"God! You truly have fallen! You're no longer the existence I admired! I'm disappointed, <Midnight killing Devil>!"

"I don't care what you admired. You selfishly forced your ideals onto me, then selfishly looked down onto me. That's just crazy."

"Say whatever you want.... Your reign is indeed over. From now on I'll be the <Midnight killing Devil>. And as long as I live, I'll continue to kill until the world accepts my art!"

"Art, huh. Art, my ass. Killing people is art?"

"Yeah! Don't deny it now!"

"I killed people for the sake of art. That's what you're saying?"

"What's the point of confirming it now!"

"I see."

Kirisaki stopped in a set distance to <March Hare>.

"Wanna change places, <March Hare>?"

"What...?"

"I changed my mind a bit. I have to resolve this myself."

"What are you going to do, Kirisaki?"

Without answering my question, Kirisaki said.

"<March Hare>, you're saying that you're superior to me, right?"

"...Yeah."

"Then proof it."

"What?"

"You and me will fight. Should you be able to win, I'll let you go."

"...And when you win?"

"There's something I want to teach you."

Kirisaki's hand moved. She flipped her skirt. The flattering cloth. Her fingers took out the knife out the holster, then rotated it on her palm, grabbed the hilt and took a back-handed stance.

"—So? Up for it?"

Her corner of the mouth bent in a challenge.

In an abandoned factory without people echoed the sound of clashing metal intermittent. Kirisaki and <March Hare> were slashing at each other without mercy with drawn knives. There was nothing to do for me. I was overflowing with the desire to smack down <March Hare>, but Kirisaki had said that she would resolve it herself, so it was her fight. It was not for me to interfere. Actually, if I were to step in clumsily, my whole body would end up cut up in no time.

But leaving Kirisaki aside, <March Hare>'s movements weren't normal either. He already slightly passed the level of an average person like me. He showed no fear towards the knife that would hurt without mercy and even responded to hurt his opponent in return on an opening. That was something totally out of my range. <March Hare> avoided Kirisaki's cut with the slightest movement, then stepped in and at the same time aimed at her chest. The tip of the upraising knife went close by Kirisaki's chin, as she had slightly bent backwards. Kirisaki's back sweep scraped off <March Hare>'s jacket. Steel against steel and screams raised. They had exchanged so many blows, yet none of them were bleeding. Simply amazing. It was a skill totally useless in society, or at least here in Japan.

But surprisingly it was Kirisaki, who was slightly liable in the count. One-by-one her movements were slightly slower than <March Hare>'s, even visible to my amateur eyes. Occasionally she had openings of the span of half a moment. As proof of that, Kirisaki had clearly more holes made from a knife in her clothes than

him. Will she be okay? Hey.

Counting was a pain. After some endless clashes of knives, nearly at the same time, they both stepped backwards like they repelled each other.

Kirisaki fiddled with the knife in her hand.

<March Hare> shook his own weapon. Then he looked down on his hand as he felt something amiss. Soon afterwards he tilted his head slightly.

"....Strange. Are you really my admired <Midnight killing Devil>?"

"...."

"I can't see any refinement in all your movements. It's no different from a bizarre murderer, which this world has so rottenly much. The reasons I had my eyes on you were because of your superior art that robs you off your consciousness and your polished skills worth of admiration. To put it simply,"

<March Hare> throw the knife up, which made a turn in midair, then he caught it between his fingers.

"Right now you're lacking in madness."

Kirisaki didn't answer. She silently took a stance with the knife in front of her eyes and took a breath.

<March Hare> gave me a side-glance.

"...Is it because of him?"

Kirisaki also shifted her gaze. Wh- What the. Don't look at me together.

"If so, I'm extremely disappointed. Without doubt you're a genius murderer, who appears only once in a hundred years. And to think your skills would degenerate just because you fell for a guy—"

"You sure have a loose mouth."

Kirisaki suddenly opened her mouth. <March Hare> showed a displeased expression about being interrupted, whereupon Kirisaki raised one corner of her mouth in scorn.

"That's why you're just a fake."

"...What?"

"Refinement? Art? Skill? You sure run your mouth. Just what do you know about me?"

Kirisaki slanted her eyes and said like spitting out.

"What you seek isn't me. But just your ideal embodiment of your desires. You just wanted to believe that there are others in the world that think and act like you and that it isn't strange."

"What...?"

"You wanted to be recognized by someone. That the stuff you do isn't wrong."

Kirisaki's knife reflected the dim sunlight.

"You wanted to be forgiven. You wanted to be embraced by someone and get your head patted, didn't you?"

"Shut up."

"If you seek that of me, I have to disappoint you. I'm not so generous. I have my hands full with myself."

Holding her knife horizontally, Kirisaki raised the corners of her mouth.

"—If you want a pat on the head, go ask your mama, boy."

"SHUT UUUUUUUUP!"

With a violent outburst, <March Hare> dashed forward.

"What do you know! What do you know! What do you knooooooooow!"

The simply thrown knife aimed at Kirisaki's throat. But Kirisaki said without trying to protect herself.

"....You're more foolish than I thought. Any further talk is useless."

She combed up her hair with her free hand and smiled.

"Let's end this. —-About time I get serious."

She moved —-At least to me it looked like Kirisaki only took a simple step forward. But in the next moment, <March Hare>'s knife flew through the air along with a loud metallic sound.

"...Huh?"

No, that wasn't all. Along with a massive splash of blood, numerous "something" scattered around.

That were—- <March Hare>'s fingers.

"Aw—Ugh—-GYAAAAAAAAAAH!"

While holding his hand and screaming, he fell onto his knees. On his body too was a red line engraved. In that one moment, she had sliced twice? What a fearsome girl. <March Hare> screamed in pain while he collapsed. His superior behaviour from earlier was gone and all that was left was a human being choked in pain.

"My fing, My fingeeeeeeers! Owwww!"

"Did you really think you could take me on equally? I lack madness? Don't make me laugh."

While fiddling with the knife in her hand, Kirisaki approached <March Hare>.

"You didn't even realize I was playing with you, yet you dared to imitate "me"?"

He retreated scared. Kirisaki looked down on <March Hare>.

"....What's up, Mr. Artist? Wasn't I already someone worthless to you?"

"Sh- Shut up..."

"You only lost a few fingers and look the state you're in. And the wound on your body shouldn't be fatal either. So stand up already. When your right hand is useless, just hold the knife with your left hand. Try to cut me."

<March Hare> showed no movement. Kirisaki said in total spite.

"Can't do it? Don't make me laugh. When you pick up a knife, be at least prepared to get cut yourself. You only talk big, but do everything only half-assed. In the end, you're just one of these stupid brats."

<March Hare> looked down and mumbled. "I can't hear you. What did you say?" Kirisaki asked. Then <March Hare> mumbled clearly louder.

"I'm... a superior human."

Soon he continued like a damn on his mouth had been lifted.

"I'm a superior human. I have a wonderful ability. A chosentalent. Everyone denies

and looks down on me but soon I'll laugh at them. I'm a genius. I'm stronger than anyone."

His blood-shot eyes faced Kirisaki and he shouted while spilling drool.

"I'm! Stronger, than anyone! I have to be!"

"Those who are really strong, don't claim so themselves."

"Don't spout such unrefined woowords!"

<March Hare> grabbed the fallen knife with his left hand and thrust it towards Kirisaki's chest. The repelled knife drew a couple of lines in the air, then clashed

with Kirisaki's, afterwards they separated. That looked similar, yet contradicting.

"DieDieDieDieDieDieDieDieeeeeee!"

"...How stupid. I have enough of talking with you."

Kirisaki sighed. Just like a bored kid in a grand fight.

"It's over for you— Get that already."

<March Hare> received a sever kick from Kirisaki into the side. He moaned and lost his balance. Upon that opening, Kirisaki pierced <March Hare>'s fist with her knife. Blood gushed out when she pulled it out. Screaming in pain, <March Hare> inadvertent let go off his knife. He shouted.

"Sh—"

At that moment, Kirisaki thrust her knife against <March Hare>'s neck, while he widened his eyes.

Kirisaki smiled faintly.

"....Get it now?"

"Guh...."

....Seemed like the fight was over. I shook my head in relief.

<March Hare> looked up in the sky. He quietly closed his eyes and took a small breath.

"....It's my loss."

"Certainly."

"Kill me."

"What?"

"Just kill me."

<March Hare> said grumbling.

"...Just like others notice that they can play the flute well or that they can make others laugh, some day I noticed that I can kill better than anyone. But that was all. I had nothing else. I was athletic, but not enough to go professional. I was dumb. Still, I worked hard. But it was in vain. Nobody valued my talent. Not just that, when one day my parents found me dissecting a rabbit, they told me: 'What are you doing! That's disgusting.' I explained it to them. How great my skill was. How valuable it was. But it was no good. They just became more disgusted."

His lips crooked lightly.

"...How happy do you think I was when I met you? How hard do you think I worked to get closer to you? I practiced and practiced. I continued to polish my skills. I thought I finally found it. A comrade for me. No, something even more. But it was different. Yeah, different. I admired you. I respected you. But I know you were different from me."

<Mach Hare> looked at me. Then he grumbled disappointed.

"How did you end up like that. You should always stand above me. As long as you're there, I can go on living in whatever world....Ah, but forget it. Whatever I say, it's too late now."

He leaked his last words.

"Okay—Kill me."

Kirisaki didn't answer immediately. For a while she looked at <March Hare>. How much time passed like that? Then Kirisaki said.

"...No, I won't kill you."

"What?"

"I told you that I have something to teach you."

Kirisaki put down her knife.

"You won't... kill me?"

"You're misunderstanding. I'm at fault for that too, but—"

"You say— you won't kill me?"

<March Hare> widened his eyes. His cloudy, white eyeballs looked up into the sky. Right there, like that he got on his knees. And then....

At first I thought it was a roar of some animal. Because it was a strange sound like from a spam, that I never heard before. But in time, I understood what it was.

...He was laughing.

<March Hare> was leaking an unpleasant laughter like he forced it out from the bottom of his throat.

"You won't kill me— Aw, what a shame, <Midnight killing Devil>. To think you would make such a choice. A real shame."

"Hey—"

Then.

“—It’s just no good.”

When Kirisaki raised her voice as she noticed something, he made his move.

“I can’t be killed by you when you’re like that.”

Without a moment to be cautious, a dull sound echoed. I knew that I unconsciously leaked a “Geh” from my mouth. I first noticed it when I pressed on my throat. My throat was—

My throat was pierced.

“Guh, Gah....!”

“Kugito!”

No voice was coming it. The bleeding didn’t stop. The shocked Kirisaki rushed over to me. I wanted to shout: Wait. If you do that, you’re just playing into his hands!

But I didn’t even have time to face Kirisaki and point behind her. <March Hare> pulled out another knife from his pocket and stroke out at Kirisaki’s defenceless back.

“—!”

She turned around. Kirisaki immediately opposed the incoming knife. Actually it looked like she would barely make it. But then the worst circumstances took place.

The moment Kirisaki’s knife engaged with <March Hare>’s, it broke at the hilt. I remembered how Kirisaki told me that her knife was in bad shape. And with the repeated sever attacks it finally reached it’s limit. At the worst timing ever. Kirisaki made a hounded expression. <March Hare> laughed with a face that said he had won. The tip of his knife was moving straight towards Kirisaki’s chest.

“.....!”

I shouted Kirisaki’s name, but my sliced throat had lost it’s normal functions. Kirisaki looked my way and smiled. Just like she had given up on something. Stop it, I shouted in my heart. In my head floated a familiar scene. The collapsed Rin. My powerlessness a that time. Agitation pierced my insides. I couldn’t do anything. Damn it....!

—Don’t

Rin said.

—Don’t leave Kirisaki alone, okay.

“.....!”

At that moment, something burst open inside me and I started running. I knew that I couldn't possibly make it. Still, I couldn't stop. I was certain. Kirisaki could start anew. Even if she was a terrible serial killer, she could start over as long as I was there. My ability that I thought to be fucking useless, was the greatest salvation for her. That's why I wouldn't abandon her. I must not abandon her.

I would never leave her alone!

“....Ah....g....!”

Spitting out incomprehensible words with my muddy voice, I faced Kirisaki and reached out my hand. But I didn't grab anything. <March Hare>'s dagger drew near Kirisaki. Then—

Kirisaki flipped her skirt.

The light cloths fluttered.

Under it appeared the bear patterned panties.

And then, Kirisaki—pulled her “other knife” from the holster on her thigh.

“Wha!?”

<March Hare> widened his eyes in surprise. Kirisaki's hand sent the knife coming at her flying. No, that wasn't quite it. The flying knife from <March Hare> was stilled “being grabbed”. In other words, Kirisaki had— sent his knife flying together with his hand. And while she stepped in, she took her raised up knife and—

stabbed straight into <March Hare>'s chest.

“Bah—”

When she pulled out the knife, fresh red blood spurted out.

<March Hare> leaked a shaking voice. For a while he staggered, then he—

“Impos...sible...”



suddenly collapsed backwards.

"....Mh."

While looking at her own weapon, Kirisaki turned my way. Then she smiled faintly.

"I knew it, the sharpness of a Randall is on a different level, Kugito."

I lost all my strength and sunk to the floor. Wh- What a misleading smile.... So her smile meant that she still had a trump card?

"What's up, Kugito?"

I shook my head silently. I didn't want to say anything anymore.

"But that was a close call. If it weren't for the Randall knife that you bought me, I would have died. It's all thanks to you, Kugito."

.....Well, glad to hear.

"Now then...."

Kirisaki passed by me and stood before the collapsed <March Hare>.

"I avoided your vitals. You should be still alive."

<March Hare> had his eyes closed, when he slowly opened his eyelids.

"....Why."

He said mumbling.

"Why won't you kill me...."

"Don't get the wrong idea. It just means I'm not that naïve to release you from everything by killing you."

After she flipped her skirt and put her knife away, Kirisaki continued.

"Live and atone. —That's the burden you and me have to carry."

"....."

"....And I'll teach you something."

Kirisaki picked up the broken knife and let it rotate in her hand. She grabbed the hilt, then threw it to her feet.

She raised her foot and trampled on her old weapon with all her might.

"What...?"

"You seem to misunderstand. I'm only killing to satisfy my own desire. For nothing more or less. What I want, what I worked for to get is something else."

"....What?"

Kirisaki said. Quite clearly.

"A bond, <March Hare>."

Crouching down, Kirisaki made eye-contact with <March Hare>.

"...No matter how much I stabbed, my heart was never satisfied. I knew it that. But no matter how many people I came into contact with, no one loved me and I wasn't supposed to love. But I still desired it. Anyone would be fine, just someone who would look at me for who I am."

Then Kirisaki said slowly and quietly as she was carefully choosing her words.

"Do you get it? I'm no God. —I'm just a simple human."

I sighed, rolled around on the spot and looked up the sky. How stupid. Even without me doing anything, she can pull it off just fine by herself. I did something embarrassing.

My whole body hurt all over. It was all because of Kirisaki. Anyone but me would have already died of this.

....Well,

"Since it's me, I'll forgive you...."

The blue sky stupidly extended above me. Suddenly Kirisaki's face entered my field of vision.

"Are you alive, Kugito?"

"I won't die."

"Yeah, right."

Kirisaki smiled. "I forgot." Liar.

"Can you stand?"

"Somehow. What about you?"

"Not anything worth mentioning."

"How tough."

I raised up my upper body with guts. I touched my throat. It had already started to heal. Proof for that was that my voice somehow came out, even though still muddy for a while. Such a disgusting body as ever. I put my hand on my knee, stood up and said.

"What about him? Is he dead?"

"No, I avoided his heart. It was a promise with you. Let's leave the rest to the police."

"How faithful of you."

I shrugged my shoulders, when Kirisaki smiled a "I keep my promises. Like you."

"I didn't do anything."

"Really? To me it looked like you were trying to save me with all your might earlier?"

I shook my hand. I didn't want to say anything about that.

"...Then let's go home."

"Yeah, let's....Whoops."

As Kirisaki was about to walk away, her legs staggered. I immediately reached out and supported her body.

"Be careful."

"It tired me after all. After all I'm just a frail and beautiful high school girl."

I had not clue what to say back to that.

"Can't be helped."

For a moment I let her go, then grabbed her arm and put it around my shoulders.

"A special service."

"I would prefer you would carry me like a princess."

Don't ask for the impossible.

"Okay, let's go."

"Yeah."

And then we walked away side by side.

From the dim darkness, towards the light.

—As if. If I only could act that cool.

I heard a strange noise. It was just so out of place that I didn't know what it was at first. But in time my dull brain could finally analyze it.

It was applause.

A dry sound of hand against hand echoed numerous times.

"What....?"

Kirisaki said alarmed. At that moment.

One after another, a couple of men appeared from wherever they might have been hiding. Well, actually there were women too, but that didn't matter. Everyone wore a black suit and even sunglasses. Moreover everyone was giving an applause. Even suspicious had it's limit.

"Some wonderful skills. Nothing less from the <Midnight killing Devil>."

The group of black suits formed a circle around us. The last one to appear was a woman. From our perspective, she stood at the top of the circle. Her age was around the same as ours. She was rather short. Like everyone else, she also wore a suit and in one hand she held a laptop. Her expression was dreadful "void". It was blank like she was wearing a mask and completely featureless with no shred of emotion. Her tone earlier also was monotone like from reading a script.

"Who are you...?"

"Names are unnecessary here. I am nothing but a messenger."

The woman stopped her applause and the others followed her suit. I would guess she was the leader and that would make the others her subordinates. A brat on top of adults? What was going on?

"I have a message from a certain person, Kirisaki Kyouko-sama. Will you listen to it?"

"How do you know my name?"

"It is not just your name. We have all personal data on you. From basic things like your address, cell phone number or the school you attend, to even things like your interests, likes, your favourite TV show, your favourite book genre, how often you go to the toilet or how often you masturbate a day. Obviously, we also know about your particular tendency."

That was a practical threat of "We can't guarantee what will happen if you don't listen obediently". Even though she kindly asked if she would listen to it, it was inexorable. What was up with these guys?

"There's no proof you're telling the truth."

"When you are doubtful, I do not mind speaking all the details here."

The woman returned smoothly. By her expression it didn't seem like she was lying. Kirisaki clicked her tongue.

"...Let's hear it."

"Thank you. But there is something we must do beforehand, so please wait a moment."

"What?"

The woman gave a wink, the group of black suits nodded nearly in unison. Then they started walking all at once. Still lending my shoulder to Kirisaki, I turned around. The black suits surrounded the still collapsed <March Hare>, who was probably unconscious.

"Hey, what are—"

Before I could finish my sentence, one of them pulled out an automatic pistol from his pocket—wait, an automatic pistol!?

"Stop—!"

My shouting wouldn't change anything. At that moment, a gun-shot echoed. <March Hare>'s body jumped up a bit and his halfway raised hand fell powerless onto the ground. I inadvertently looked away. And I glared at the woman.

"Why did you kill him....!"

"Rest assured. It was an anaesthetic."

"What?"

"Please carry him."

On the woman's words, the men picked up <March Hare>. From my point I couldn't tell if he was alive or not, but she had no reason to lie. I took a breath and asked the woman a belated question.

"...Just who are you?"

"I cannot answer that question. Since we are <nobody> by principle."

"...What do you mean?"

"I will tell you the message first."

The woman opened the laptop and started the media player.

After a while a synthetic, strange high pitch sound started playing.

"...I guess first off it's a nice to meet you, <Midnight killing Devil> Kirisaki Kyouko and Node Kugito. You did a good job on the current incident. We got some really valuable data, I thank you for that. Now onto the main topic."

After a selfish prologue, the one-sided conversation continued.

"I'm sure you must be tired, but I'm afraid I have something I must tell you. I want you to come over as quickly as possible. Of course we'll prepare the method of transport. Just follow the woman, who gave you this message. She'll guide you to me. See you then."

For a moment there was silence, then the woman closed the laptop.

"That concludes the message."

"....I have no clue what's going on. Explain it from scratch."

"I will do so at the other location. Will you follow me?"

"What if I said no?"

The woman nodded on Kirisaki's words.

"While we would not force you to, it would not really be a smart choice. Like I told you earlier, we have data on any trivial thing about you, Kirisaki Kyouko-sama. In case you should deny our request, it would be leaked to a certain place. Likewise you, Node Kugito-sama, would surely be arrested for assisting a murderer. I believe that would sadden your sister."

....That bitch.

The black suits passed by the woman, carrying the limp <March hare>.

"...What'll happen to him?"

The woman answered.

"That is of no concern for you."

An indifferent way of talking that didn't reveal anything and rejected further questioning.

"Now then—"

The woman pinched the laptop and turned her back to us.

"—I take it that you will come with me?"

Chapter 07: The girl, who fell in love with the Immortal Boy

Both Kirisaki and me blindfolded, we rode an unknown black, high-class car. It likely was so that we couldn't specify where we were going.

For how long did we drive? Our surroundings lost the ruckus of the city and soon enough we could hear horses and a river. My inner clock told me it took one, no two hours. Anyway, it was a long trip.

Finally the car stopped and a female voice said "Please get out".

Guided on our hands, we walked a gravel path. After a while, the ground changed to concrete. I heard an automatic door opening. We stopped for a moment, then walked again. It seemed we entered a building. The backs of my shoes hit on the floor with a CLACK, CLACK.

CHING. A bell sounded. An elevator? We stepped in. I felt weightlessness beneath me. It indeed was an elevator. We went downstairs quite a bit. For a period that started to worry me, the boy in where we were trapped didn't stop.

Another bell. The door must have opened. We once again walked.

BEEP. Along with that sound, a machine continued to work. Kirisaki mumbled "What strict security. So many electronic door locks", but no one answered. Where were they taking us?

"We are here." said by a female voice. Then the clattering sound of a manual lock being opened. Everything so far had been high-tech, so why would they rely on manual only at the very end?

"My liking."

Whose?

The door must have been opened. We walked.

The floor suddenly got soft. A carpet?

The door was closed behind us. Now our blindfolds were removed for the first time.

Not that removing them changed anything. It was pitch-black.

But—I felt a presence. Someone except those, who brought us here. Was someone in front of us...?

"Welcome to my castle."

An unnatural shrill voice. I thought the voice was familiar, when I remember that it was the same as from the media player.

"I welcome you, Kirisaki Kyouko. And also Node Kugito."

Suddenly a white light burned my retina. Inadvertently I covered them with my arms. The lights had been turned on.

It was a simply broad room with hardly any furniture. And before us stood an unknown man. His elbows on a high-grade table, he was resting his chin on his crossed hands. But the light was shining on us from right above like a spotlight and the face of the far-away sitting man still was clouded in darkness. Besides him, probably his secretary, was a young woman whose hair was neatly cut around her shoulder.

"I apologize for having to bring you all the way here. Because of my work, I cannot step outside so easily."

"Then I now can ask the question I had been holding in all the time?"

Kirisaki opened her mouth.

"—Who exactly are you?"

"I cannot answer this question. Didn't the woman beside you tell you that?"

"You surely can't expect us to obediently accept all this after just telling us that ridiculous stuff."

A giggling laughter. The man said.

"You do have a point. But is there any need for me to answer your question?"

"At least,"

Kirisaki answered.

"I have no intention to speak with someone, who won't even introduce himself."

"And what if I said your circumstances don't matter? Judging by this situation, it should be obvious on who is in charge here."

"Are you threatening me? You sure take me lightly."

Looking around, Kirisaki snorted.

"I could kill all of these guys immediately and just walk out. Be aware that I'm only behaving now, since I want to know what you're after."

"...A confident statement. But can you really do that?"

"What was that?"

At that time I felt the gaze of the man changing towards me. What? But since he didn't say anything, it might have just been my imagination. A cough sounded.

"Well, fine. Let me grant your wish. Then let me explain. ...Putting on airs in a roundabout way or frankly and short, which one do you prefer?"

"The latter please."

"Really? It'll be too late to regret afterwards."

"Just say it."

"...Okay."

The man said.

"We are from the government."

For a moment, my brain was about to blown out of my head.

"G- Government? What are you saying?"

"I knew it would come to this reaction. I think the putting on airs in a roundabout way would have been easier to accept."

"...Explain it."

"In short?"

"In order from scratch."

Kirisaki said, when the man said somewhat happily "Understood".

"Then where should I start from? Let's see. This might take some time. First let's get some coffee. Makiko-kun, coffee please."

The woman beside him answered.

"I'm not your secretary, so please get it yourself."

"....I'm going to lose face when you don't act upon my words here. It's an iron rule for situations like this."

"I have no intention to do anything besides my duties."

Saying that clearly, the woman called Makiko bowed.

"...."

A moment of silence. The man stood up and walked to the back.

"Nah, I don't really want any coffee."

"Just talk already."

"...Is that so?"

The man turned around and said "Then I'll just get one for me".

"I'll talk while I'm getting my coffee. Let's see...You might already know, but humans are living creatures that sin. To begin with, humans are destined to have to kill other living creatures to survive. Quite sad, isn't it."

"If this is going to be a preaching, you're doing it right. But unfortunately for you, I'm irreligious. And also an atheist."

"....I believe that god exists. It's just that he seems to hate us. That's why he isn't doing anything. So we have no choice but to survive with out own strength."

In the silent room, the inappropriate flavour of coffee hung in the air.

"One of that is what we call law. Endless regulations who punish those that committed a crime—They protect our order and promise peace. This system was build on this basis long ago and even with it's form changed, it was unbroken and proceeding. And even in our current society it is alive."

"So what about it?"

"Don't rush me, Node Kugito. Still, even in a world protected by laws, some people commit crimes. Though in most of these cases they are judged by the system properly."

The man returned to his seat with a cup and took a gulp.

"...Kirisaki Kyouko, you're one of them."

"...."

"I don't have to tell you that each human has his own life. And it's not something to be endangered by someone else. Even less is it unforgivable to sever that life premature."

The sound of the cup being put away. The man said.

"Actually, Kirisaki Kyouko, while you might think you covered it up nicely, we already know that you are the ."

"What...?"

"While these latest continuous scandals were misleading, the Japanese police is quite capable. Or at least, they aren't so bad that they would be deceived by the plot of a mere high school girl."

"...Then why wasn't I arrested? If what you were saying is true, then I should have been judged right away, shouldn't I?"

"Indeed. But you see, Kirisaki Kyouko, talent is a dreadful thing. No matter how arrogant or how violent, for a person, who's called a genius in some field, certain exceptions are made for it's achievements. Sometimes—even exempting him for the absolute law."

Kirisaki's expressionless face twitched. Like she realized something.

"—Kirisaki Kyouko, we were having an eye on your outstanding talent— your excellent killing skills. It means the government considers you valuable for something else, rather than you execute you."

"...Valuable for something else?"

"Node Kugito aside, you, Kirisaki Kyouko, probably don't know either. That the world has other criminals that excels at a . They are all people, who would receive the highest punishment at court, but... they are far too capable to just throw them into jail like that, or even to kill them. We—or rather, the people at the top believe that talented people like you should atone in some kind of other way."

Once again he rested his chin on his crossed hand with his elbows on the table.

"...That is what gave birth to our organisation. We have no name. No, I should say there is no need for a name. Since we officially don't exists."

"Enough of your saucy speech. Hurry up and continue."

"Why so stiff, Kirisaki Kyouko. Well, fine. I'll be frank.

—Our goal is it to find highly skilled criminals and to scout them for the organisation behind closed doors. Like with your case."

"...What are you going to make them do after you scouted them?"

"A good question, Node Kugito. By the way, earlier I said that people created laws to judge criminals, but do you believe that to be absolute?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think all criminals are judged by the laws?"

"Think or not, early you said yourself that most get judged appropriate."

"Only most of them, Node Kugito. The world also has criminals that don't get

judged. While they dragged a lot of people into despair, they are happily walking under the sun even now.”

“There are guys like that? Besides the one you try to scout?”

“Exactly. And sadly enough, some laws are made according to them.”

I didn’t get what he was saying.

“You mean politicians and through them corrupted influential people.”

Kirisaki answered. The man said.

“Exactly. Our laws judge criminals. But there are involved various hidden agendas, so depending on the person the judgement can turn void. It is truly pathetic. There are cases where you want to inflict punishment, but cannot do so. Our constitutional state would be shocked if it heard this.”

“Even lamenting about it that now, it has been going on for ages.”

“You sure stay cool.”

“It’s only due that there are contradictions when humans judge other humans. There might be a problem with calling it inevitable, but there isn’t another way.”

“...Do you really believe that?”

The man lightly tilted his head.

“Leaving alone those guys, who hurt many people out of their own selfish profit and making the roots of our country go bad, can you really give up on this reality by calling it ‘inevitable’?”

“People sure love to beat around the bush. Just say it clearly.”

Upon Kirisaki’s challenging words, the man lightly twisted his lips.

“To rule a country, laws are needed. Otherwise humans can’t keep their reasoning. You often hear the dispute about ‘Why am I not allowed to kill a person?’—but the answer is quite simple: Because the law says so. On the contrary, without the law humans would simply kill each other. Because they don’t have a reason not to kill.”

“I don’t think people have fallen that low” There were also people like Rin.

“Oh my, Node Kugito. I never thought I would hear such words from you.”

The man giggled.

“—Weren’t you abused by your father for a long time? I’m impressed you could say that considering we have laws and you saw a person commit a crime right

before your eyes.”

“....”

The words were stuck in my throat. To my regret, I couldn’t say anything back.

“....So, what do you want to say? You want to start a revolution, since a law that overlooks criminals is useless?”

“Not really. Law is needed. To keep our reasoning. The problem is that some people want to escape from that.”

The man said.

“—Those who commit crimes, even ignore the laws that were created to prevent these and live an unsightly life, won’t be accepted as humans by us, the government. Non-humans don’t need a law. And to judge those who don’t need laws—normal methods won’t work.”

His voice was shrill—but also ominous.

“So we wondered if there wasn’t a better way and as a result we came up with a brilliant idea. If we cannot officially judge these worst criminals, we just have to have them atone by other means.”

“...Indeed. I can see the picture now.”

Kirisaki clicked her tongue. “You’re the worst.”

“It helps that you’re so quick to understand.”

I was left behind alone.

“Node Kugito-kun, it seems you don’t follow us, so I’ll explain it. Easy to understand, that is.”

Ah, I was taken for a fool.

“Have you ever seen *Deadly Workers*?”

I wasn’t interested in historical drama. But I knew what it was about.

“I see, too bad. It’s a really interesting show. That aside, my point is: To get rid of those in the shadows, who can’t be judged in public. Of course it’s about cowards, who live a carefree life despite their evil deeds and pretend to be a Samaritan on TV. Just throwing them into jail won’t solve anything. So we literally get rid of them.”

“...You couldn’t be.”

The only visible lower half of the man's mouth twisted.

"We can. Our goal is it to scout highly skilled criminals and turn them into *workers*, instead of a punishment. Well, to them it's like a punishment."

"Wait a moment. Then you want Kirisaki to join your organisation?"

"That's how it turns out."

"Don't fuck with me!"

I tried to run forward, but the black suits behind me hold me in a double nelson. Damn, let go of me!

"Excellent killing skills my ass! Kirisaki's life was ruined because of it!! And now it was finally about to come to an end!"

"Thanks to you."

"! ...Oh right. You just know everything, huh. Yes, that's right! She won't kill anymore! She promised it to me! From now she'll be a normal girl—"

"You and Kirisaki Kyouko might be fine with that, but what about everyone else?"

"...What?"

"What about the people she killed so far? They were innocent. They were all good people. Surely they had a loving family. What will you say to their saddened wives, husbands, kids, friends and relatives? 'It couldn't be helped that they were killed. But things will somehow work out, so please allow her to live as a normal girl now'?"

"...Kuh"

I relaxed my strength. I was released from the hold. When I looked at Kirisaki, she was staring expressionless at the man.

"Don't you think it's a bit too convenient to become happy yourself after you ruined a couple of lives, Kirisaki Kyouko?"

Kirisaki looked down. She clenched her fists and said quietly.

"...Yeah."

"Exactly. Crimes have to be judged. Yours in your own way."

"And what if I still decline?"

"Then I have no other choice but to execute you right here. We were given this right."

Silence. Kirisaki took a small breath. Then

"...Just tell me one thing."

"And what?"

"Were you the ones, who gave my personal data?"

What?

"...You're sharp. That's right."

"What for?"

"Mh, fine. I don't think you'll like it, but I'll explain it if you want.

Like you, — I think that was his handle man. His real name... is not important now.— was marked by us. He also had a high skill, but sadly not even close to your level. But then I had a good idea. It was a good opportunity."

A good opportunity?

"Who would win in a fight between you two? We were also just at the point to make a final decision about scouting you. Lately was displeased with you and boasted that he'll become the next . So we called ourselves <God's child> and gave words of encouragement and your date. We believed doing so would make him go out to kill you. We never imagined he would start killing people around you. Kuon Rin—was her name, right? We caused her quite some trouble."

"You...!"

I once again tried to move, but was caught by the men.

"Because of you, Rin was! I'll kill you!"

The man chuckled on my shouting.

"Don't get the wrong idea, Node Kugito. We are doing nothing but providing possibilities. It might have ended differently though. To the utmost, it was , who inflicted grave wounds on Kuon Rin. Don't misunderstand that part."

That was just the same! Fucking bastard!

"...What would happened if I lost?"

"At that time, we would have scouted . If you had lost to him, it would merely mean that this was your limit."

"I see" Kirisaki sneered. "In the end, and me are just pawns to you."

"To be frank, yes. Well, though he was a knight and you a queen. The fun about

chess is that you can make a turnaround depending on the handling of the pieces. Don't you agree?"

"I'm not interested in chess, so I don't know."

"I see. That's too bad. ...So, what will it be? I would like to hear your answer."

Kirisaki stayed silent. She cast down her eyes in thoughts.

"Kirisaki...don't accept. I'll protect you. I won't let you be used by them."

Kirisaki looked at me and smiled. She nodded faintly.

Then she faced in front again, took a deep breath and spit the words out.

"—I decline."

I got the feeling that the man leaned forward a bit.

"...Hoh? An intriguing answer. You listened to all my story, understood what you had to do and still decline our proposal for guidance?"

"Like you said, there are certainly criminals in this world, who live a carefree life without being judged. And I know that I'm one of those that won't be forgiven, even without you pointing it out. But becoming your dog and killing others with your permission is a different matter."

"...Then is there any other way to atone for your crimes?"

"Who knows. I might get officially judged without ever getting to know about it. Or I might be killed by someone, who holds a grudge against me. But that's not right now. It's in the future. One day, it indeed might come a time where I find a way to atone for my crimes."

The man laughed. He grumbled a "Geez".

"Positivism sounds all good, but... it's a foolish thought, Kirisaki Kyouko. It's the same as a pseudo idealist, who only prays for a world where everyone lives together in peace. Listen, those who place their eyes onto the distant, unseen future and exaggerate into "one day", will never do anything. And like that they just fall to ruins with regrets. It's the same as running away from reality."

"That might be."

Kirisaki readily nodded and continued with a "—But".

"It's still better than being forced into a choice by you here."

"..."

"Do you want to become a god? You present a merciful solution and if that's rejected, you label it as foolish and get rid of everything? Don't screw with me. I'll find my own solution. It might be something you cannot agree on and I might lose my life before realizing it, but that's my responsibility. By all means I decline on a temporarily peace gained by resigning myself to your choices."

"Even if your actions are hypocrisy?"

"If you call it hypocrisy, then so is your proposal."

"It's not hypocrisy, but necessary evil."

"Just using another word doesn't change the fact that you're killing people decorated in gaudy words."

"Such an inelegant way to put it. It is a purge. Someone has to do it."

"Your opinion is plausible. But do it on your own. I have not the slightest interest in it. Neither in your ideas, nor in your actions. Not even in your existence itself."

Kirisaki quickly turned on her heels.

"You sure brought me a long way to tell me a lame story. Kugito, we're going."

"Y- Yeah."

I was completely overwhelmed by Kirisaki's resolute demeanour. I hastily followed after her.

But the men blocked Kirisaki's path. Kirisaki glared at them fiercely.

As to match her movement of flipping her skirt, the men reached into their pockets. But—

"Stop it."

A restraining voice stopped all movement.

"....Good grief. There would have been no problems if you just obediently had listened to me. Actually, I'm a pacifist."

...Apparently the meaning of "pacifist" had changed without me noticing. The world was at it's end.

"...Do you plan to kill me?"

"Yeah, that's right. Regretfully I might have to."

"Just try it."

I said. I took Kirisaki's arm and pulled her to my side.

"Shoot us or whatever. I'll protect her."

The man giggled as he took my words as a bluff (not that I could blame him).

"...Even if I don't kill you here, the hands of law will surely get to you. Is that fine with you?"

"I'll cross that bridge when I get to it. I prepared myself for at least that much when I set my lifestyle."

"Do you really believe that?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you not afraid of death?"

"So persistent. Don't make me repeat myself. It's not a matter of being afraid or not."

The man mumbled solitary.

"—Even now where you know of Node Kugito?"

Kirisaki shut her mouth. Tightening her lips straight, she closed her eyes.

And then

"...It's the same."

She said shortly, but determined.

"I see..."

The man fell silent. For a while the silence continued.

"...This is an unpleasant situation. Truly unpleasant. It's so unpleasant that I'm about to use my last card."

"What?"

"It seems you still don't understand. About 'who' exactly you're up against."

After a sound of searching for something, the man said solitary.

"...Yeah, it's me."

I immediately understood that he was making a call. The man frivolous gave a message.

"—An urgent matter. Kill Kuon Rin immediately."

".....! Bastard!"

Kirisaki shouted. The man beat on the desk with the index finger of his free hand.

"I didn't really want to use this card. Since this organisation technically is an ally of justice."

"Ally of justice my ass...! You're a coward. You bastard!"

"A leader exists to get a bad name. To get excellent people, I don't mind to do any kind of revilement."

Chuckling, the man said.

"Let's stop the sweet-talk about atonement and whatnot. Kirisaki Kyouko, I want you. You're needed for our organisation. I'll make simple order:

—Kill people for me."

Kirisaki bit on her lips. She strongly clenched her trembling hands.

"If you still want to go home, then do so. But I'm serious."

"Kuon— Rin isn't related to this!"

"That's what hostages are about. To make people obey without interest, principle and persuasion, this is the best way."

"...Are you really from the government? What you're doing is no different from these hoodlums."

"It's to show the difference in power between us. Though I peacefully wanted to advance the talk."

That bastard—I got the impulse to smack him, but I knew there was no point in doing so here. Kirisaki squeezed out her voice.

"You—don't just kill criminals then? When you kill innocent people for your own gain, then you're no different from those who judge."

"You have a point."

The man held up one finger. He seemed to have somewhat fun.

"Kirisaki Kyouko, that's why you have to ponder. If my own words were faithful and my order to you was just a bluff to make you waver. Or— If I'm a lying worst kind of guy full of contradiction that would do anything for the organisation."

Kirisaki's eyes averted from the man. Her fist were clenched and her teeth grinding. For the first time after coming her, Kirisaki was agitated. Only obvious.

Impatience grew in me too. Which of the choices the man offered was correct? "Who" exactly was the man in front of us? No idea. Even though we talked for a while, I couldn't tell at all what kind of guy the man in front of us was.

"Kirisaki Kyouko, to you, the girl Kuon Rin isn't someone special. You might even think somewhere in your heart that I should just kill her. But you can't speak that out aloud. —Right?"

Kirisaki didn't say anything. The man continued.

"There will be people saddened about Kuon Rin's death. This will be unbearable for you, won't it? And by her death, you might lose what you finally got your hands on. That—"

"...Stop it already."

Finally opening her mouth, Kirisaki said.

"Stop it. I feel sick. I don't want to talk with you anymore."

"... Then tell me your answer."

Kirisaki's sharp eyes faced me. Like they were urging me. I tried to say something. But before I could, Kirisaki averted her gaze. And then—

"...Fine. I'll accept your proposal."

"Kirisaki..."

"Wonderful."

The man searched for something. Then after a while he said.

"...Yeah, it's me. Cancel Kuon Rin's disposal."

Then a dry sound echoed. At first one. Then they increased. By everyone present except Kirisaki and me. A storm of applause swallowed the place.

Stopping his hand, the man said.

"A wonderful decision. Thank you."

"Don't get the wrong idea. I won't obey your every word. If I don't like your methods, I'll resort to suitable methods."

"For example, like you did earlier?"

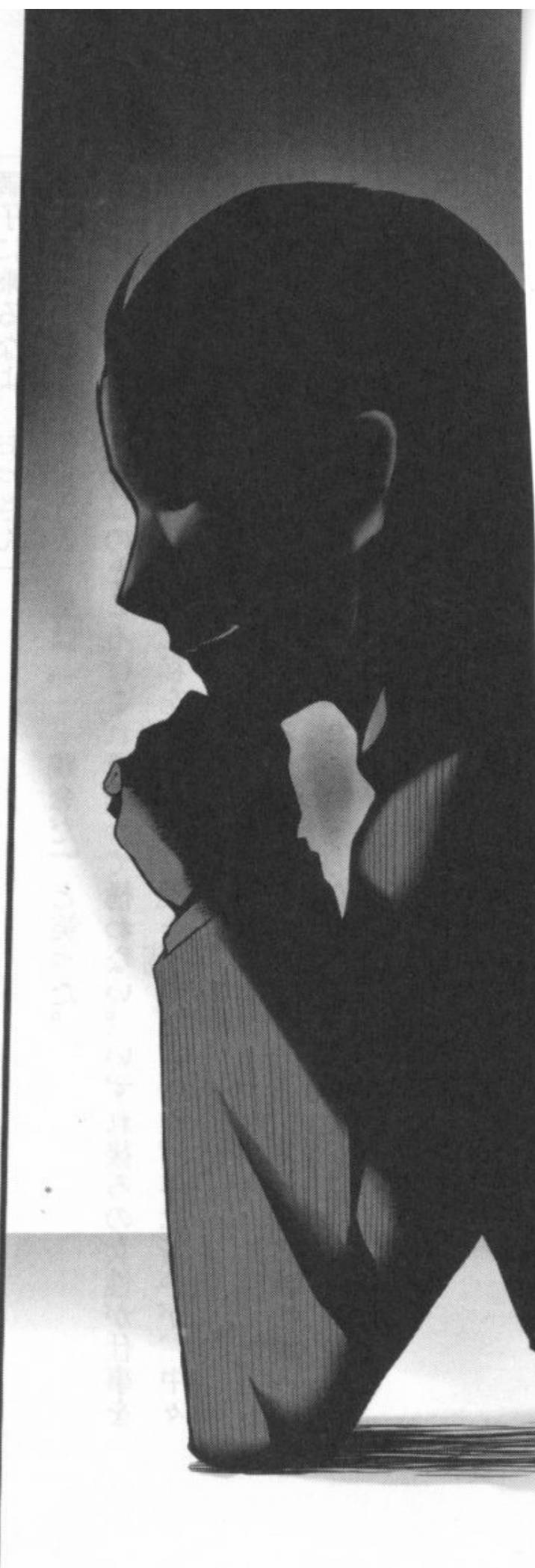
An amused tone. Kirisaki didn't answer. The man said "...Well, fine".

"Of course I'll hear out your opinion towards your duty to a certain extent. Having such convenience is only proper. But I won't allow the refusal of an order itself.

Any objections on that?"

"...Should I say it possible depending on the situation?"

"Compromise at least that much. If you're too selfish, even the gentle me will get angry. My subordinates are all excellent. When I get angry, they 'work well' even though I didn't say anything. To calm me down— Yeah, to make you obedient, they might do something considerate."



“...You low-life.”

Kirisaki clicked her tongue.

“Completion of negotiations. I’m truly pleased. We will work together for a long time. How about a handshake to our friendship?”

“Don’t get cocky, old geezer.”

I said with a harsh voice. The man laughed with a “...Too bad”.

“Well, fine. Then you can leave for today. In time the woman behind you will bring you a job. From now on, she will be your contact person. She’s young, but very capable.”

The black suits grabbed us at the shoulder. Forcefully turned around, we proceeded. I grinded my back teeth. I was irritated. In the end, I didn’t do anything. I was the most angry at my powerless self.

“Node Kugito.”

I stopped. I stayed without replying, when a voice called out to me from behind.

“I’m not telling you to do anything. You have committed no crime. So we have no right to restrain you. But we want you to stay at Kirisaki Kyouko’s side. From now on too.”

The man continued.

“Node Kugito, why don’t you consider it to be like this? Surely what we do cannot be called correct. But because of our existence, the number of victims is slowly, but steadily decreasing. They won’t turn out like Kuon Rin. From now on Kirisaki Kyouko will undertake dangerous missions. With you at her side, she will be reassured. So, will you cooperate?”

After a moment of silence, I said.

“...What you’re saying might be right.”

I grinded my back teeth.

“But—I don’t like it.”

“Too bad. But most likely, you’ll act like I said. After all, you seem to be soft-hearted.”

You’re saying it, bastard.

“Then I’ll send you off.”

The woman opened her mouth after a long time. Her tone was unchanged stiff.

We were blindfolded.

Then we started walking into the darkness.

When I got off the car, I was at Meitou park near my house. It was already evening. The woman left a "Until then" behind and left.

Kirisaki and me watched the leaving car without saying anything. For a moment I considered memorizing the license plate, but wondering what good it would do, I didn't. Before long Kirisaki faced me and said.

"...Okay, time to go home. My clothes are dirty and I want to change."

"...Yeah."

As such we started to walk. We loitered on an empty street with just us two.

I followed lightly behind Kirisaki and watched her back. That continued for a while, but suddenly I shouted "Kirisaki". She stopped.

"...What?"

"Well...do you know what you did?"

"Of course."

Kirisaki turned around, linked arms with me and said.

"We don't know if they are really from the government. But it's certain that they are rather dangerous. It was highly likely that Kuon Rin would have been killed if I hadn't said that."

Well, yeah...

"Are you really fine with that? Somehow it turned into a real mess."

"...Kugito."

What?

"Were your words on that rainy day when you embraced me true?"

"...What?"

"I won't leave you alone."

Kirisaki looked at me. The setting sun dyed her profile red.

"...Yeah." I nodded firmly.

"I said it on the spur of the moment, but... I'll keep my promise."

"I see."

Kirisaki smiled.

"Then I'm fine."

"You, well, you know—you might have to risk your life. Are you going to find your resolve on these mere words?"

"It aren't mere words. They were important to me. I'm fine with just having you by my side."

I was at a loss for words. I also thought so when she told me that when we were walking all alone, but how could she say that so simply?

"...But you're going to kill. Again. You finally—might have been able to live a normal life."

"...I know. To be honest, it's frustrating to be used. But—it might be a retaliation for ending up with a relation to someone."

She sighed. Kirisaki leaked a wry smile.

"It might be some kind of punishment for the crimes I, who had to live in solitude, committed...."

She raised her hand and strongly clenched it in front of her chest.

"—But"

Kirisaki said.

"I don't regret to have chosen to live by meeting you. Even when if it's in exchange for various despair and sadness I have to shoulder from now on."

She strongly declared.

"—I plan to find my own solution in the atonement that was forced onto me."

Then she deeply lowered her head towards me.

"So, please take care of me again.—I want you to stay with me until the end."

"...You."

"Of course—I won't tell you to leave everything behind as to stay with me. That would be... too convenient. Since it really doesn't concern you."

"...No—"

I scratched my head. So, what should I say...

Such a situation was a first for me—well, obviously. At times like these, I should just say something quickly.

“...Somehow...”

Sorting the words in my head, carefully opened my mouth.

“It turned into a bigger mess than I had anticipated. I can’t keep up with it at all. What I understand is that it’s quite dangerous. To be honest, I want to run away.”

“Understandable.”

“But leaving you behind and returning to my every day life alone is probably impossible.”

“...If you’re worried about me, there is no need to. That much—”

“I should not worry? Impossible. To be frank, that’s absolute impossible.”

I sighed.

“When I ate at home, take a bath, watch TV or read a book, I’ll definitely think about you. Wondering what you’re doing right now. If you’re cutting people or getting cut while I’m leading a peaceful life. I would be so worried that I can’t sleep. Definitely. That’s just a huge bother for me.”

“Kugito...”

“So staying with you around the clock is way better. Then I don’t need to worry needlessly.”

Besides, I added.

“While that guy’s words pisses me off, it makes sense. When this power, which I thought to be absolute useless, can help even a bit to prevent the emerging of victims like Rin, then it becomes meaningful for me too. That’s why it’s not your problem alone.”

I put my hand on Kirisaki’s head and nodded deeply.

Then I rustled her head like that and argued.

“So don’t say it doesn’t concern me. I told you. I’m dating you. From beginning to the end.”

“...”

“Mh? What’s up?”

"No—Nothing."

Kirisaki adjusted her hair and faced forwards somewhat hastily.

"...I understand your feelings. It can only be called feyness."

"Ah. I was about to think so too."

"But—"

Kirisaki mumbled quietly. I couldn't hear it well, but it sounded like a—thanks.

"You said something"

"No, nothing. Okay, let's go home. Tomorrow I have to pay Kuon Rin a visit."

"Don't suddenly revert back to such every day talk."

"I don't know what the future brings. But let's enjoy the present, Kugito."

"I can't tell if you're positive or just not thinking at all."

"Being positive means not to think at all, doesn't it."

Uh, I couldn't deny that.

"By the way, what would be could for a get well gift?"

"Like I know. They say you should take something you would like to receive yourself."

"I see. Then a new knife."

"Stop it."

"A killing manual."

"Stop it."

"A psycho horror story about the every day life of a killing devil."

"Anymore and I'll get angry."

"The CIA's"

"Stop!"

Kirisaki started to walk. I continued to follow behind her and during our never-ending exchange, I suddenly looked up to the sky.

The madder red sky was stupidly clear.

“...Geez.”

Now that I thought about it, I got involved with someone unbelievable. Could it be it's your fault up there? Then I'll come flying up right away and smack you a good one. I'll threaten you to put an end to it with that. So, how's it? Mh?

I waited for a while, but I didn't get an answer.

Only obvious.

I got the feeling that someone someday said that worrying was proof of being alive. But well, I couldn't care less.

“Hey, Kugito. Let's go already.”

“...Yeah.”

I made a big sigh.

Just how would things turn out from now on?

Of course I didn't know that. But one thing was certain. My agony seemed to be far from over.

Postscript: Never-ending story

The man stood in the dim darkness.

A needless broad room. There were only him and a woman.

"...When things go well, I can't help but actually doubt it. That I actually might be deceived."

The woman answered the man's mumbling.

"You're the one, who deceived."

"How rude. I merely listed them the possibilities. I didn't know if they would accept it or not."

"But once again we won them over like planned."

"Exactly. It means I won the bet."

The man picked up a paper from the table. There were written detailed data about a person.

"<Immortal Boy>, huh—A truly fascinating person. He might prove even more usable than Kirisaki Kyouko."

While chuckling amused, the man turned on the stand light. The paper glided onto the table.

"Let's put both of them to good use next time—"

Lightened up in orange, the context of the paper revealed itself in the dim darkness.

<Name: Node Kugito>

<Gender: Male>

<Age: 17>

<Personality: On first glance he looks composed with a pessimistic view, but a passion is buried within him>

<Family Circumstances: Lost his mother at a young age. Grew up with abuse from his father, later left the house with his older sister Yukika. Since then those two live together>

<Characteristics: Has an abnormal cell regeneration ability and a defence ability against attacks to his body (could not be analyzed)—>

<In other words, immortal>